

PEOPLE AND SPACE  
IN THE MIDDLE AGES, 300–1300

STUDIES IN THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

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PEOPLE AND SPACE  
IN THE MIDDLE AGES, 300–1300

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with illustrations by

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## NOTE ON GLOSSARY ENTRIES

Where a word is highlighted in **Bold** in the following text, followed by an asterisk, this indicates that there is an entry in the Glossary for this word.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

AM	The Árni Magnússon Institute, Reykjavík.
<i>Burgos</i>	<i>Documentación de la catedral de Burgos (804–1183)</i> , ed. J. M. Garrido Garrido (Burgos, 1983).
<i>Cardena</i>	<i>Colección Documental del Monasterio de San Pedro de Cardena</i> , ed. G. Martínez Díez (Burgos, 1998).
<i>CIL</i>	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i> .
<i>DB</i>	<i>Domesday Book seu Liber Censualis Willelmi Primi Regis Angliae</i> , ed. A. Farley, 2 vols (London, 1783).
<i>DB Warwicks</i>	<i>Domesday Book</i> , vol. XXIII: <i>Warwickshire</i> , ed. J. Plaister (Chichester, 1976).
MGH	Monumenta Germaniae Historica
SRG	Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum
SRM	Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum
SS	Scriptores
TIR, K-30, Madrid	Unión Académica Internacional (Comité Español), <i>Hoja K-30: Madrid, Caesaraugusta-Clunia</i> , Tabula Imperii Romana (Madrid, 1993).
VCH	Victoria County Histories.
Wissenbourg	<i>Traditiones Wizenburgenses: Die Urkunden des Klosters Weissenburg, 661–864</i> , ed. K. Glöckner and A. Doll (Darmstadt, 1979).



## INTRODUCTION: COMMUNITY DEFINITION AND COMMUNITY FORMATION IN THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES – SOME QUESTIONS

Wendy Davies

**T**he contributors to this book share a sustained interest in the way human communities used land in the Middle Ages and in the way those communities were in their turn shaped by the landed resources available — that is, in the literal as well as the symbolic interaction between people and space. We all have a particular interest in the early or central Middle Ages in Europe, and some of us in the later Middle Ages too. This period of time has a distinctive place in landscape and land-use history, falling as it does between the models of pre-history and the detailed recoverable information on intention that characterizes the modern age. Research methods are therefore necessarily distinctive. There are plenty of relevant sources available, but their use is rarely straightforward. We have some more or less imperfect written descriptions of the exploitation of the land, very unevenly distributed across time and space. We also have a growing body of archaeological observation, of settlement, burial and linear features as well as environmental evidence; although directly relevant, this comes with plenty of problems of interpretation. Alongside those primary sources, materials of later date, with judicious use, can be employed to illuminate otherwise uninterpretable fragments, be they sixteenth-century English ecclesiastical dues, eighteenth-century Icelandic land registers or nineteenth-century Breton cadastral records. In the essays that follow, we share a commitment to using all available kinds of source material and to exploiting the interdisciplinary potential of those materials.

We are all conditioned by the orthodoxies of the last generation and so none of us would subscribe to pure environmental determinism; however, we certainly do not share the belief that environment had no impact. A population's economic

and cultural relationships to the space it utilized are central to any understanding of pre-industrial societies, as they remain central to image and identity in our more economically complex post-industrial world. Hence, it is one of our aims to clarify the impact of the environment; in order to do so we have worked within the framework of the strong geographic and climatic contrasts between the regions of the Spanish *meseta* and Iceland, and between those two and the temperate zone of lowland England and northern Francia. The Icelandic material is especially important, given that the country was settled for the first time in the ninth and tenth centuries AD.

What follows is an exploration of the relationship between populations, territory and community membership. There have been many studies of territoriality, animal as well as human; examples such as the classic paper of Wynne-Edwards on the territory of the red grouse (most pairs using between 2 and 4 ha of land) come to mind. Social animals tend to be identified with group territories, witness primates as well as birds: the home range of a group of gorillas may use 10 km<sup>2</sup> of territory, lemurs less than 1 km<sup>2</sup>; an average 5.6 pairs of great tits occupy about 10 ha of land in good mixed woodland; and most European readers will be familiar with the concept of the cuckoo as the stranger — the lone intruder into group territory.<sup>1</sup> Comparison of animal territories, discrete to the species, has sometimes been made with those of human groups but it is much more usual to distinguish human territoriality from that of animals, since political and proprietary interests intruded determinants additional to the imperatives of food, shelter and reproduction. In researching human territoriality there has been a good deal of work by geographers and anthropologists on the distances people move in the normal course of their lives. A person's journeys are certainly significant in respect of resource gathering; but they are also one of the factors that define community: the daily range of any person will determine the people with whom he or she will habitually come into contact and thereby will define one of the communities of which he/she is a member; his or her annual range, or exceptional range, may

<sup>1</sup> V. C. Wynne-Edwards, 'Self-regulation in Populations of Red Grouse', in *Malthus Past and Present*, ed. J. Dupâquier, A. Fauve-Chamoux and E. Grebenik (London and New York, 1983), pp.379–91 (pp.384–85); T. H. Clutton-Brock and P. H. Harvey, 'Primate Ecology and Social Organization', in *Readings in Sociobiology*, ed. T. H. Clutton-Brock and P. H. Harvey (Reading and San Francisco, 1978), pp.342–83 (p.358); V. C. Wynne-Edwards, *Animal Dispersion in Relation to Social Behaviour* (Edinburgh, 1962), p.149; T. Malmberg, *Human Territoriality: Survey of Behavioural Territories in Man with Preliminary Analysis and Discussion of Meaning* (The Hague, 1980), pp.43, 32–33.

define others, and so on.<sup>2</sup> Much of the theory in fact focusses on the relationship between productivity of the land and its distance from the worker's settlement: at its simplest, the greater the distance the worker had to travel the lower the productivity. Comparative studies of mobility between village centres and associated arable highlight differences in culture even within Europe: in Spain they may be up to 6 km apart and in Sicily up to 8 km, but in France and Germany 2 km or less. Stronger differences emerge with comparators beyond Europe, like those between communities that repeatedly use the same arable fields and communities that use swidden cultivation, where the population density is much lower and the individual's range much wider.<sup>3</sup>

Much of the above work stemmed from concerns about feeding an increasingly populated world; much therefore relates to modern, twentieth-century populations and lacks any sense of a past or of change over time. Nevertheless, it has informed the arguments of prehistorians in their estimates of the range of hunter-gatherers, or of the density of settlements and of populations, in a far distant past, in the quest to reconstruct the economic basis of prehistoric communities and identify the springboards of cultural change.<sup>4</sup> Change over historic time has primarily been the concern of historical geographers and historical demographers, working in particular on regular and exceptional journeys, in the context of urbanization or rural migration or travel to markets; in mid-fourteenth-century Nottinghamshire the mean distance between markets was, at 5.26 km, lower than the distance to the arable for some southern Europeans, the contrast emphasizing

<sup>2</sup> See R. D. Sack, *Human Territoriality: Its Theory and History* (Cambridge, 1986), for a useful overview.

<sup>3</sup> The classic work is J. H. von Thünen, *Der isolierte Staat in Beziehung auf Landwirtschaft und Nationalökonomie* (Berlin, 1876; first part published Hamburg, 1826), translated in *Von Thünen's Isolated State*, ed. P. Hall (Oxford, 1966). See also P. Haggett, A. D. Cliff and A. Frey, *Locational Models* (London, 1977), pp.28–29, 198; T. Carlstein, *Time Resources, Society and Ecology* (London, 1982), pp.209–32; M. Chisholm, *Rural Settlement and Land Use*, 3rd edn (London, 1979), pp.45–49, 58; C. Geertz, 'Two Types of Ecosystems', in *Man, Space and Environment: Concepts in Contemporary Human Geography*, ed. P. W. English and R. C. Mayfield (London, 1972), pp.165–80 (pp.167–74).

<sup>4</sup> For example, C. Renfrew, ed., *The Explanation of Culture Change: Models in Prehistory* (London, 1973); I. Hodder, *The Present Past* (London, 1982), especially pp.93–158; D. Green, C. Haselgrove and M. Spriggs, eds, *Social Organization and Settlement: Contributions from Anthropology, Archaeology and Geography*, 2 vols, British Archaeological Reports. International Series, 47 (Oxford, 1978) — note the assumptions of Part 1, Section 1, 'Frontiers, boundaries and group interaction'.

the speed of economic and cultural change in late medieval England.<sup>5</sup> A few historians have reflected this interest by concentrating on particular aspects of human territoriality and their potential for stimulating change: riding was usually the quickest way to move about and the fastest riders could make outstanding time; the increased use of horse power in the late Middle Ages extended the distance people could travel and return home at night; so did improvements to the road system in sixteenth-century England.<sup>6</sup> The work of historical demographers has been particularly important in tracking changing patterns of mobility within the family: the distance people would travel to find marriage partners in Spanish Valencia in the early eighteenth century, where 80% of husbands from one area came from within the same **parish**\*, is comparable to — though more limited than — that in parts of seventeenth-century English Northamptonshire, where 80% came from within 5 km, but distances very rapidly extended in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in England.<sup>7</sup>

Where there is a pre-twentieth-century dimension to work on human territoriality, it tends to be focussed on prehistory or on the later Middle Ages and early modern period, often in the latter case on the beginnings of industrialization and the associated range of social and economic changes. There is relatively little on the earlier and central Middle Ages even though these issues of changing territorialities have a particular significance at that period. Early medieval western Europe characteristically had small-scale polities and small-scale social systems; while political fragmentation was extreme, political change was often rapid. As larger polities emerged, governments began to use local communities; in so doing, they sometimes brought them out of a previous obscurity. Determining the relationship between the local and the governmental is crucial to understanding the process of politicization: did the larger polity depend on building blocks of

<sup>5</sup> T. Unwin, 'Rural Marketing in Medieval Nottinghamshire', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 7 (1981), 231–51 (pp.243–44); the distance rose by 1600 as the character of marketing became more urban: *ibid.*, pp.247, 251.

<sup>6</sup> F. M. Stenton, 'The Road System of Medieval England', *Economic History Review*, 7 (1936–37), 1–21 (pp.16–17); J. Langdon, *Horses, Oxen and Technological Innovation: The Use of Draught Animals in English Farming 1066–1500* (Cambridge, 1986), pp.254, 270; B. P. Hindle, *Roads, Tracks and their Interpretation* (London, 1993), pp.65–66.

<sup>7</sup> J. Casey, *The Kingdom of Valencia in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, 1979), p.211; R. F. Peel, 'Local Inter-marriage and Stability of Rural Population in the English Midlands', *Geography*, 27 (1942), 22–30.



pre-existing communities? Or did the needs of government in effect call local communities into being? Or did both — or other — things happen?

There were of course all kinds of community in the Middle Ages — household, family, village, district, perhaps even polity, to name the most obvious. The process of group formation in human society has generated a very large literature, especially during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a literature which has often treated the emergence of human communities in evolutionary terms. Many writers have argued that the earliest forms of community arose because people co-operated as a survival strategy: the theme of social man gradually taming the surrounding environment is a commonplace in all kinds of theoretical framework; in such approaches human territoriality is directly relevant to community formation.<sup>8</sup> In more recent societies, the close connection with the land has been seen to weaken, human territoriality to change its nature and the relationships which underpin society to become commercialized; in classic terms, *gemeinschaft* (community) became *gesellschaft* (society) — small-scale, neighbourhood, ‘genuine’ communities becoming absorbed in large-scale, ‘transient’, competitive society.<sup>9</sup> More recent writing reinstates space as a significant factor in social formation, but a constantly stretching space in an increasingly globalized world; a strong thread in the most recent writing, as in current politics, is now to do with giving the spatially defined local group a voice in the widening political community, as it were ‘real’ community as against ‘imagined’.<sup>10</sup> Territoriality has therefore in a sense returned. In all this there has been a temptation to place medieval society, and particularly early medieval society, squarely within the models of ‘co-operation for survival’ and to suppose that most human groups were discrete, and struggling to make a living, in the medieval world. In this book we start out with the belief that medieval society, and early medieval society too, was much more complicated than this, with complex patterns of interdependence and complex relationships

<sup>8</sup> R. Leakey and R. Lewin, *Origins Reconsidered: In Search of What Makes Us Human* (London, 1992), pp.137–52; for surveys, see M. B. Brewer, ‘On the Social Origins of Human Nature’, in *The Message of Social Psychology*, ed. C. McGarty and S. A. Haslam (Oxford, 1997), pp.54–62 (pp.55–56); P. Dickens, *Society and Nature: Towards a Green Social Theory* (New York and London, 1992), especially pp.29–33, 144–46.

<sup>9</sup> F. Tönnies, *Community and Civil Society*, trans. J. Harris and M. Hollis (Cambridge, 2001; first published 1887 as *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*).

<sup>10</sup> P. Dickens, *Society and Nature: Changing our Environment, Changing Ourselves* (Cambridge, 2004), pp.21, 225; cf. A. Giddens, *Runaway World: How Globalisation is Reshaping our Lives*, 2nd edn (London, 2002).

with the surrounding natural world. Another central question, therefore, is about the significance, or even relevance, of simple co-operation for survival in this medieval world; how far did communities owe their existence to collaboration for survival and how far did other factors, whether territorial or non-territorial, condition community identity?

If the communities of the early Middle Ages are clearly underinvestigated, there has nevertheless been some work which is suggestive. In the last ten years there has been plenty of attention to community formation in early medieval Europe in the context of the 'Transformation of the Roman World' project. Much of this work has focussed on ethnicities and on the formation of political communities.<sup>11</sup> Valuable as that work is, it does not help us with the face-to-face community — the household or the village or the network of associates; it is not much in touch with the ground. In eastern Brittany in the ninth century, however, we get a rare glimpse of face-to-face human communities in action — rare for the period because of the unusual nature of the recording tradition. In this Breton case the community of the *plebs* is explicit in the texts that survive — 'village' would be the nearest modern analogy for *plebs*.<sup>12</sup> Individuals had membership of this or that *plebs*; the members of the *plebs*, the *plebenses*, met and did business together; developments that would affect them were reported to them; officers were defined in relation to the group. The *plebs* also had a territorial dimension, although membership did not extend to everyone who lived on the territory, which had clearly recognized boundaries: property was located in this or that *plebs*. In scale this was usually of the order of 40–50 km<sup>2</sup>, that is 6–7 km across, twice the size of the later administrative unit of the commune, but it could be smaller (10–15 km<sup>2</sup>) or larger (100 km<sup>2</sup>), although both extremes are very rare. Total population size cannot of course be counted at such a date but reasonable estimates are possible and suggest a relatively high density of population, in the order of thirty-two people per km<sup>2</sup> (compare fifty-one in 1801 and thirty-eight in 1990). Those residents who were excluded from the community were servile, often farming a small-holding, but returning all of its surplus to the free peasant

<sup>11</sup> See especially W. Pohl and H. Reimitz, eds, *Strategies of Distinction: The Construction of Ethnic Communities, 300–800* (Leiden, 1998); R. Corradini, M. Diesenberger and H. Reimitz, eds, *The Construction of Communities in the Early Middle Ages: Texts, Resources and Artefacts* (Leiden, 2003).

<sup>12</sup> For all this, see W. Davies, *Small Worlds: The Village Community in Early Medieval Brittany* (London, 1988), especially pp.63–85. For some further examples, see now C. J. Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2005), cc. 7 and 8; see below, pp.299–300.

(or sometimes aristocrat) who was landlord; these people were very clearly present; they are named but they had no voice; they did not go to meetings, make decisions or join in public argument. In the ninth century the *plebs* were agrarian communities, with a highly developed sense of the difference between freedom and servility, living by mixed farming, with a fair amount of arable cultivation. With such a population density, such an awareness of status, and the cereal-growing habit, it is not surprising to find communities with a very self-conscious sense of identity.

Human communities, at least in historic time, are rarely discrete or exclusive of others. *Plebs* were not the only kind of rural community in early medieval Brittany. The community of churchgoers was coterminous with the *plebs*, but by implication more populous; the *plebs* church was central to the social and business life of the *plebs*, and several priests served it. Nested within the *plebs* were family and other households, and residential units (hamlets) which had identities distinct from that of the *plebs*, sometimes called *tréf* or *locus*<sup>13</sup> in the texts (which sometimes, like Tréal near Ruffiac in the Morbihan, became the focus of a later commune). It was membership of the *plebs*, however, which gave 'civil rights', to use an anachronistic analogy, by offering access to mechanisms for the redress of wrongs and for legitimizing transactions; membership of the *plebs* had a special significance: for the purposes of civil society it was the 'core' community. Any individual would, however, have belonged to all or several of these communities, and to communities beyond.

Although human society was a complex of overlapping communities, *plebes* themselves did not overlap: ninth-century texts convey a strong sense of limits; people moved from one to the next and knew when they were doing so. However, as well as having communities within them, they were themselves nested within other kinds of community, some of which were overlapping. Firstly, there were what one might describe as 'communities of reputation'. While most of the *plebenses* are only ever seen within their own *plebs*, a small proportion (up to 20%) went to meetings in two or three *plebes*, travelling up to 30 km to witness transactions or serve on panels of jurors.<sup>14</sup> These people were trusted peasants, sometimes wealthy but not necessarily so, whose reputations stretched beyond their own community's limits, called in by others to add legitimacy and weight to proceedings. Then there were the communities of the patronage networks of large

<sup>13</sup> Cf. the rather different use of *locus* in Sennis, below p.276.

<sup>14</sup> See Davies, *Small Worlds*, pp.105–33.

monasteries like Redon or Landévennec or of the noble retinues of counts and rulers; these were largely aristocratic or clerical, but the monastic networks could involve peasants too. Beyond those were the communities of county and diocese (not usually coterminous) and beyond those again the community of the *regnum*, the polity, insofar as it existed. The last three did not have much meaning for peasant society, but they did for aristocrats and major clerics, who met with count or bishop or ruler.

The extent to which any of these communities were or are visible on the ground is debatable, but many years of fieldwork, combined with close attention to text and enhanced by knowledge of the pre-industrial landscape that is revealed by the cadastral records of the early nineteenth century, established that the community of the *plebs* was in part defined topographically, that is, by large stretches of uncultivated land (*landes*) bounding the farmed areas; the *landes* themselves were to some extent determined by long ridges of conglomerate and harder rocks.<sup>15</sup> The previously uncultivated *landes* are often not immediately evident nowadays, although experience can help identify some of them through soil type and stoniness; systematic fieldwork can identify others, especially through the absence of medieval pottery — in this landscape of ubiquitous pottery scatters, land without sherds of the central and later Middle Ages clearly was not cultivated at that time.<sup>16</sup> These *landes* (in particular the latter cases) do not always relate to the underlying geology and the agricultural potential of soil types. They sometimes seem to be determined by cultural factors. The communities of the central Middle Ages worked so much and so far of the available cultivable land, but not all of it.<sup>17</sup>

What determined the size and shape of these ninth-century communities? In part, but in part only, the underlying geology. They were clearly not defined by labour patterns: whether one looks at the evidence of 825 or 1825, the arable occurs in many discrete zones; those who worked it lived beside it; they did not have to walk to the edge of the *plebs* or commune because residences, despite the existence of a nucleated centre, were highly dispersed. The potentially useful tool of distance between settlement centre and arable simply is not appropriate here for community definition. The community of neighbourliness, on the other hand,

<sup>15</sup> See G. Astill and W. Davies, *A Breton Landscape* (London, 1997), especially pp.10–32.

<sup>16</sup> Astill and Davies, *Breton Landscape*, pp.120–21.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Carlstein, *Time Resources, Society and Ecology*, p.293, on the lack of a relationship between rural population density and environmental factors like soil type or climate.



Photo 1.1. The contributors at Lara, northern Spain.

was defined by simple proximity and had more to do with the residential units of hamlets than with *plebes* or parishes, a characteristic still evident in the seventeenth century when godparents nearly always came from the same hamlet as the parents of the child baptized.<sup>18</sup> All the *plebes* had centres, and they all had churches in those centres. Is it possible that the community of the *plebs* was defined by the distance of the walk to church? Most churches were within an hour's walk of the periphery and even the larger were no more than one and a half hours' walk. The answer is not obvious, and argument quickly becomes circular, but the question is important.

And so, the contributors to this book set out to share experience about medieval people's use of space in the areas they know best, to see where there are common factors and to identify what makes for difference, conscious always of the varieties of relevant evidence, of the difficulty of marrying different kinds of evidence, and of the influence that the nature of the evidence has upon interpret-

<sup>18</sup> As in Ruffiac in 1670; Davies, *Small Worlds*, p.128.

ation. We asked the obvious questions about physical markers in the landscape — boundary markers, natural and man-made, linear and separate. Were they present? What did they mark — extents or separations? What of focal points or central places: were they physical structures like churches or were meeting places recognizable only through occasions? Were they genuinely focal or were they in fact incidental to the structures? Did they have practical or symbolic value, or both, or neither?

We also thought about definitions of community in the Middle Ages and about evidence of community existence and identity. Who did the defining, the members of a community or outsiders, contemporary or later? Did the manifestation of community represent a self-conscious expression of identity or was it created by some external agency — a district liable to pay tax or tithe, or to produce ships or fighting men?

We considered issues of extent. Were our communities physically discrete or scattered? What was their scale; did it relate to the disposition of residences or labour patterns or walking distance or riding distance; and did this change over time within our period? Did it include ‘everyone’ in the district, however the district may have been defined, or only a subset of residents, such as aristocrats or clerics or fighting men; did it include most but exclude some — such as slaves — without rights of social participation, faceless residents with no voice? Indeed, did communities overlap? To what extent were communities ‘nested’ within one another and how did the elements vary as they scaled up or down?

And we thought about the determinants of community identity. From a wide range of potential determinants the most obvious are environmental factors, from physical features and climate to forces for change like farming practice and erosion. Then there are the core demographic factors of population size and density and the economic imperatives of viable production and necessary exchange. There are political factors — lordly, governmental, religious, defensive and proprietary. And there may be cultural determinants — did the circumstance of shared interest, religion, language or approach create community links?

What follows is guided by these questions, addressing sometimes a limited subset, and sometimes a wider range. Reynolds and Langlands look at a prominent linear feature in southern England and consider its political context, while Lárusdóttir focusses on the interpretation of linear features in Iceland. Callow then looks at the wide geographical range of communities, and overlapping communities, in Iceland, followed by Vésteinsson on modern methods of establishing the existence of communities in Iceland, and the improbability of either settlement or environment as determinants. Bassett also focusses on method, demonstrating



Photo 1.2. Castrojeriz, the Pisuergra valley, on the western edge of Castile.

how the large extent of early parishes in midland England can still be traced; Escalona too looks at large early units (**supralocalities\***, with central settlements), this time in Spanish Castile, adopting some very similar approaches; and Martín Viso then deals with northern Castile, looking at the changing use of **hilltop sites\***, always in some sense central places, whether used by autonomous local communities or utilized by aristocrats and kings. Still in the same part of Iberia, Cepas looks at formal, legal definitions of community in Roman Spain, and their interrelationships; Halsall then concentrates on changing modes of community definition in Roman to post-Roman Gaul and at the contrast between burial practice as a spontaneous expression of community and the fiscal district that simultaneously imposed identity from outside. Astill looks at the very late acquisition of urban identities in England (in the twelfth century), and explores the reasons, while Fouracre investigates the vast span of the dependent servile community of Marmoutier in eleventh-century central France and the overlap with other kinds of group, before change brought the consolidation of village communities in the twelfth century. Lastly Sennis draws our attention to medieval perceptions of space, and their interplay with memory and identity,

through the eyes of those who made monastic records: in their view monasteries were in every sense focal, the most central of central places.

We are concerned throughout with how we know what we know, and with how our perceptions are formed. That provides a common theme running throughout the book, notwithstanding the varieties of treatment. Although there may be a temptation for readers to use the Icelandic or the Spanish sections, or stick to England or France, we hope that they will start at the beginning and read to the end: there is a logic to the development as it unfolds. If they do this, they will develop a sense of the comparative, in its many cross-cutting and overlapping dimensions, both in regional and in thematic terms.



## SOCIAL IDENTITIES ON THE MACRO SCALE: A MAXIMUM VIEW OF WANSDYKE

Andrew Reynolds and Alex Langlands

### *Introduction*

**T**his contribution considers how medieval populations defined and reacted to a major political division in the landscape of southern England. We offer a new look at an old problem: the nature, chronology and context of one of England's most substantial yet enigmatic field monuments, its relationship to settlement patterns and social identity. A middle Anglo-Saxon construction is proposed in the context of territorial disputes between the consolidating Mercian and West Saxon kingdoms, while the frontier we suggest may well respect pre-existing territories in places and incorporate earlier features. We argue also that the nature of this frontier zone markedly affected the way that medieval settlement patterns emerged from the late Roman landscape.

Individual communities in the Wessex region are historically defined for the first time in the Domesday Survey of the later eleventh century, a historical source that identifies two principal social groupings: those at the level of the 'village' community, where social stratification is evident from the level of landowner down to slaves; and the collective community of the **hundred\*** which bound together individual settlements into a framework of supralocal common interest. The 'village' community can also be approached using physical evidence alone, but here the definitions of the historian and the archaeologist differ markedly. While the historian, sources permitting, can address social interaction between individual settlements or between households, an archaeological perspective provides a proximal view based on the study of cultural affinity, economic interaction via material culture studies, and spatial relationships based on the character, form and function of settlements. In the absence of explicit documentation relating

individual communities to spatial dynamics and territorial definition, collective participation at varying levels can be approached integrating sources such as place-name evidence with archaeological material. Our case study approaches people and space in a region hotly contested at kingdom level, which raises fundamental issues of how early medieval populations were articulated on the ground.

One of the principal factors of the group's research was to address ways that early medieval communities reacted to their environments in greatly differing landscapes and social and political situations and with varying degrees of internal and external influences. Community identities are central to the study of frontier zones, which themselves ensure a dynamic aspect to social definition with scales of identity running from the individual to the household, and from settlement to tithing to estate, before social groupings of a yet higher order: hundred, **shire**\* and kingdom.

Of the regions studied by the group, England was the most intensively settled. This aspect has left a remarkable record for students of the early Middle Ages both in physical terms, for there is barely any part of the English countryside that has not been divided by boundaries at some time, and also in the documentary record in the form of Anglo-Saxon charter bounds.

This essay offers a 'revisionist' view of the Wansdyke earthworks and associated features, utilizing physical and written evidence. Traditionally the monument is considered either late or immediately post-Roman (see below). A case is made here, however, that the frontier's monumentality, extent and composition bear closer comparisons with political and military frontiers of middle to late Anglo-Saxon date. We refer specifically to either West or East Wansdyke, or to what we term the Wansdyke frontier comprising both stretches of dyke and the Roman road that links them (Fig. 2.1). A description of the character of the dykes and related features, including the so-called Bedwyn Dykes, is given below.

### *West Wansdyke*

Wansdyke's westerly termination is generally considered to be the hill-fort Maes Knoll in north Somerset, although in the 1920s Major and Burrow noted evidence for its continuation west of the hill-fort.<sup>1</sup> Eastwards, between Maes Knoll and Horescombe in South Stoke **parish**\* (2 km south of Bath), the dyke is continuous, with the exception of a break of about 3 km where the River Chew

<sup>1</sup> A. F. Major and E. J. Burrow, *The Mystery of Wansdyke* (Cheltenham, 1926).

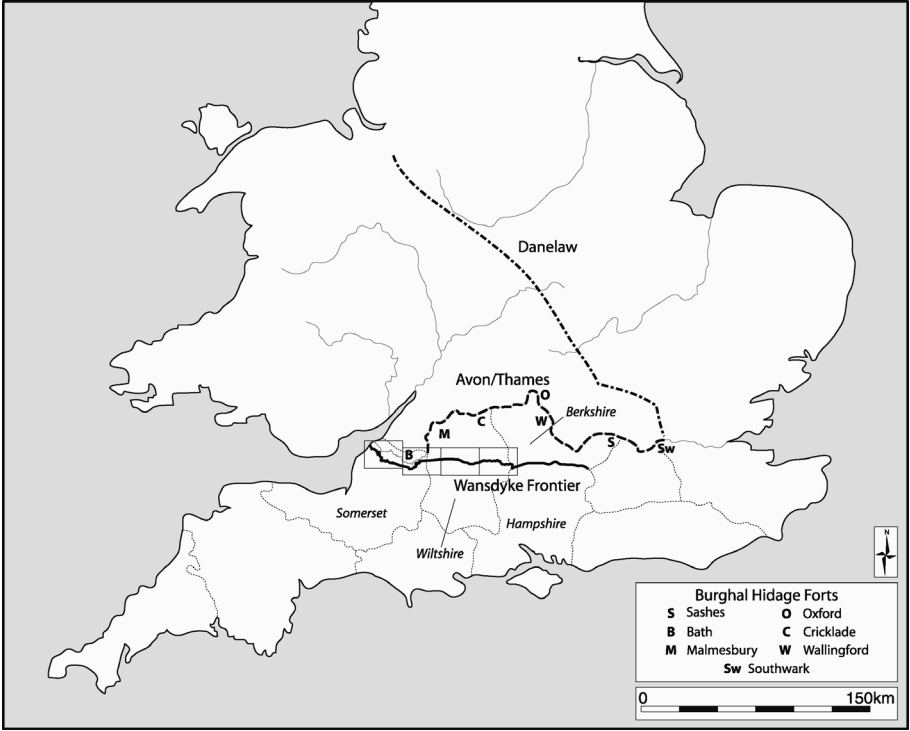


Figure 2.1. The course of Wansdyke in relation to shire boundaries in southern England.

marks the boundary line. Major and Burrow recorded the line of an earthwork to the north of the River Chew and the first edition OS map of 1811 traces this feature incorporating earthworks on Publow Hill. At Maes Knoll the ploughed-out dyke begins as a soil mark 25 m wide. Across open downland at Compton Dando, English Combe and Stantonbury it maintains a width of 22–25 m, while a bank 1.3 m high produces a scarp slope of about 8 m.

The dyke faces north on the Oolite ridge between 3 km and 6 km south of the River Avon flowing from Bath to the Severn Estuary. Through the parish of Compton Dando the dyke sits on a thin band of Coal Measure, with remaining stretches on Lias clay formations.<sup>2</sup> The dyke crowns open downland at Maes Knoll at 200 m OD; at Stantonbury and Horescombe it reaches 175 m. Fox and

<sup>2</sup> A. Fox and C. Fox, 'Wansdyke Reconsidered', *Archaeological Journal*, 115 (1958), 1–48.

Fox assert that the route chosen is not a commanding one, arguing that the field of view to the north is obscured by higher ground 'flanking' the Avon.<sup>3</sup> At no point north of Maes Knoll, however, are the downs higher than 130 m OD (as at Newton, St Loe); they normally range between 50 m and 80 m OD.

West Wansdyke shares several attributes of design with East Wansdyke. Where it can, West Wansdyke crowns the north-facing slope of the highest ground. This achieves the best defensive and visible line but allows for a series of strategic high points to be either incorporated into the dyke (e.g. Maes Knoll and Stantonbury) or sited immediately south of it (hills in Priston parish, 167 m; and English Combe parish, 143 m). For Offa's Dyke it is conjectured that beacons would have signalled from stations at high points behind,<sup>4</sup> although little field evidence has been brought to bear on this issue.

Whether Wansdyke continues west from Maes Knoll to the Severn at Portishead remains contentious. Major and Burrow assembled a series of sketches and earthwork surveys, while Collinson, vicar of Long Ashton, is said to have recorded earthworks in Somerset parishes beyond Maes Knoll and as far as Portishead.<sup>5</sup> Early in the nineteenth century Colte Hoare met with little success attempting to trace the same monuments, and little can be added to the debate without new survey data.<sup>6</sup> Fox and Fox dismiss the monument beyond Maes Knoll on the grounds that west of the river crossing at Saltford (near Keynsham) there is no need for a fortified boundary.<sup>7</sup>

The monument recorded by Major and Burrow follows the design specifications of West and East Wansdyke. It passes across the north-facing slope of Dundry Hill (202 m) skirting round the highest point of the Oolite ridge (223 m), incorporating earthworks at Windmill Hill and at Portbury Camp on Conygar Hill. This feature is common to the better-evidenced earthworks of West Wansdyke. Although no references to this dubious stretch of Wansdyke appear in pre-Conquest boundary clauses, it is noted in two early fourteenth-century deeds. One, dated 1310, in the reign of Edward II, describes a grant from William

<sup>3</sup> Fox and Fox, 'Wansdyke Reconsidered', p.45.

<sup>4</sup> D. Hill and M. Worthington, *Offa's Dyke, History and Guide* (Stroud, 2003), Fig. 46 (p.127).

<sup>5</sup> Major and Burrow, *The Mystery of Wansdyke*; C. S. Taylor, 'The Date of Wansdyke', *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society*, 27 (1908), 131–55.

<sup>6</sup> R. Colte Hoare, *The Ancient History of Wiltshire*, 2 vols (London, 1812–21).

<sup>7</sup> Fox and Fox, 'Wansdyke Reconsidered', p.37.

de Goudulph to Adam de Cloptone of a cottage with adjoining land in *Aystone juxta Bristole*, on the eastern side of *Venelle de Wondesdicke*; the other grant is closely comparable.<sup>8</sup> The date of both deeds makes it unlikely that the term was retrospectively applied, and they surely represent a genuine documentary reference to Wansdyke along a course previously dismissed.<sup>9</sup>

The intersection of the Fosse Way with West Wansdyke on Odd Down has considerable command over lines of approach to Bath, where no fewer than three Roman roads converge along with the Jurassic way. Bath is a major strategic centre and, if in the hands of an antagonistic northern aggressor, as it was from a West Saxon perspective, of fundamental importance to defend against.

### *The Roman Road from Bath (Aquae Sulis) to Mildenhall (Cunetio)*

Opinion is divided on the course of Wansdyke from Horescombe Down to Morgan's Hill, the western terminus of the stretch known as East Wansdyke. Major and Burrow found evidence for a linear earthwork running across the top of Horescombe Vale on Combe Down. Modern development obscures most of this possible stretch, although its path conforms to the design specifications of the better-preserved earthworks on the Bath-facing scarp of Bathampton Down encompassing Bathampton Camp overlooking Bath at 204 m OD. Major and Burrow's findings convinced neither Crawford nor Fox and Fox.<sup>10</sup> In 1956–57 Clark set out to identify what relationships existed between West Wansdyke and the Roman road from *Aquae Sulis* (Bath) to *Cunetio* (Mildenhall, near Marlborough).<sup>11</sup> Rejecting slim evidence for a linear earthwork connecting the two at Bathford, Clark, like Crawford, opted for a course incorporating the southern loop of the Avon. Thus West Wansdyke abutted Horescombe Brook in the Horescombe Vale and adopted the course of Midford Brook into the Avon, where the boundary would have followed the loop of the Avon up to Lacock where it would continue its course along the Roman road. Clark assumed that a bank and ditch would reappear at this junction and continue eastwards to Morgan's Hill. His excavations revealed no significant developments to the fabric of the Roman

<sup>8</sup> Taylor, 'Date of Wansdyke', p.134.

<sup>9</sup> Fox and Fox, 'Wansdyke Reconsidered', p.37.

<sup>10</sup> O. G. S. Crawford, *Archaeology in the Field* (London, 1953), pp.252–57; Fox and Fox, 'Wansdyke Reconsidered', p.36.

<sup>11</sup> A. J. Clark, 'The Nature of Wansdyke', *Antiquity*, 32 (1958), 89–97 (pp.92–93).

road, while Fox and Fox investigated the termination of East Wansdyke c.270 m west of Morgan's Hill.<sup>12</sup>

Between West and East Wansdyke the boundary runs over Oxford Clay through Selwood Forest, a significant boundary to north–south movement. Asser referred to Selwood as *Coit Maur*, 'great wood'.<sup>13</sup> That it represented a boundary of political significance between two halves of the later kingdom of Wessex is clear. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, for example, refers to Aldhelm, as the bishop 'west of the woods' *s.a.* 709, and in AD 893 King Alfred, in countering the Danes, summoned men 'both west of Selwood and east'.<sup>14</sup>

### *East Wansdyke*

Wansdyke is most impressive over the Wiltshire downs and is continuous for 19.5 km from Morgan's Hill to the western edge of Savernake Forest. On Bishop's Cannings Down, including the counterscarp bank, it is over 45 m wide. A bank of c.5 m produces a scarp slope of 12.5 m. In comparison, Offa's Dyke reaches a height of 2.44 m with a scarp slope of 9 m and is 21 m wide.

The ridge of Upper Chalk that bounds the Vale of Pewsey to the north side is followed by the course of the dyke. The highest points on the downs all lie within the strip of downland between the dyke and the northern scarp of the Vale of Pewsey; again comparable to Offa's Dyke.<sup>15</sup>

East Wansdyke does not apparently incorporate prehistoric fortifications, although it runs close to Rybury hill fort near All Cannings. It is possible that Tan Hill served a role similar to that of Stantonbury on West Wansdyke as virtually the whole monument from Morgan's Hill to West Woods is visible from the summit. In particular, the dyke forms the northern side of a rhomboid-shaped enclosure of unknown date on Tan Hill.

Fowler's investigation of access points through East Wansdyke in West Woods uses charter perambulations. Taking each reference to a *geat* or *gete* along the course of the dyke, Fowler employs earthwork survey to suggest ten original gateways, although the evidence for 'outworks' to the north of several of the gaps

<sup>12</sup> Fox and Fox, 'Wansdyke Reconsidered', p.6.

<sup>13</sup> Asser's *Life of King Alfred*, ed. W. H. Stevenson (Oxford, 1904), ch. 55.

<sup>14</sup> *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, ed. M. Swanton (London, 2000).

<sup>15</sup> Hill and Worthington, *Offa's Dyke, History and Guide*, p.127, Fig. 46.



Photo 2.1. The Vale of Pewsey looking south from the northern scarp of the vale, with Rybury hillfort in the foreground. Photo: Andrew Reynolds.

in the dyke might just as easily have resulted from breaching the monument.<sup>16</sup> This aspect invites comparisons with Hadrian's Wall and the issue of controlled, not restricted movement. Regular gates within West Woods alone allow for free but monitored movement. The pattern of milecastle > turret > turret > milecastle > turret > turret > milecastle of Hadrian's Wall is, Fowler argues, echoed in the spacing of main and minor gates on Wansdyke: main > minor > minor > main > minor > minor > main.<sup>17</sup>

Another feature of interest is a possible marking-out line selecting the best course in relation to local topography and field of view.<sup>18</sup> On Offa's Dyke, during

<sup>16</sup> P. J. Fowler, 'Wansdyke in the Woods: An Unfinished Roman Military Earthwork for a Non-event', in *Roman Wiltshire and After: Papers in Honour of Ken Annable*, ed. P. Ellis (Devizes, 2001), pp.179–98 (pp.187–91); Judie English, pers. comm. (2004).

<sup>17</sup> Fowler, 'Wansdyke in the Woods'.

<sup>18</sup> Fowler, 'Wansdyke in the Woods', p.191.

a breach of the bank for drainage works, a marking-out ditch was identified.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps a year had elapsed between the conception and construction of the dyke prompting Hill to conclude that it was a 'mature, planned response rather than a panic measure'.<sup>20</sup>

The Ridgeway or Icknield Way runs from the Wash in East Anglia, across central and southern England into the Vale of Pewsey, and possibly beyond to the Solent. Fowler's study identifies a 5 km-broad corridor stretching from Red Shore to Short Oak Copse where the Ridgeway exists as a series of braided routes running across varying terrain. Wansdyke was designed, he argues, to marshal movement along these routes.<sup>21</sup>

### *The Bedwyn Dykes*

The Bedwyn Dykes run over clay soils better suited to cultivation, and thus ploughing and erosion. At no point does the width of the dyke exceed 5.5 m. Stretches of what is better described as a 'system' of dykes have been recorded in the parishes of Great and Little Bedwyn, Shalbourne, Ham and Inkpen.<sup>22</sup> Major and Burrow, working from Colte Hoare's notes, were content that this represented a continuation of Wansdyke and identified a continuous course from Savernake to Inkpen Beacon. Today, the dykes are a series of apparently discontinuous stretches of earthwork of differing proportions.

Sections in Belmore Copse and Chisbury Wood have been discounted by both Crawford and Fox and Fox.<sup>23</sup> While Crawford implicitly refers to the stretch of bank and ditch that runs in a south-easterly direction from Chisbury Iron Age fort as 'Wansdyke', Fox and Fox see no reason to view this as a continuation of Wansdyke. Although Colte Hoare's account of the Bedwyn Dykes is early nineteenth century, stretches known to the vicar of Ham as late as 1913 had disappeared in his

<sup>19</sup> D. Hill, 'The Construction of Offa's Dyke', *Antiquaries Journal*, 65 (1985), 140–42 (p.141).

<sup>20</sup> Hill, 'Construction of Offa's Dyke', pp.141–42.

<sup>21</sup> Fowler, 'Wansdyke in the Woods', p.195.

<sup>22</sup> E. Hostetter and T. N. Howe, *The Romano-British Villa at Castle Copse, Great Bedwyn* (Bloomington, 1997), p.359.

<sup>23</sup> Crawford, *Archaeology in the Field*, p.257; Fox and Fox, 'Wansdyke Reconsidered', pp.18–19.



own lifetime.<sup>24</sup> Over one hundred years of agricultural activity could easily destroy such earthworks on clay soil. Whether the Bedwyn Dykes were continuous will perhaps never be known, although other evidence suggests its course.

Like Fowler, we can utilize pre-Conquest charters. For this area grants for Great Bedwyn, Burbage and Little Bedwyn all have boundary clauses (S756, S688 and S264).<sup>25</sup> Building on Crawford's 1942 map of the features in these boundary clauses, there are nine references to gates, all in close proximity to the dyke as plotted by Colte Hoare and Major and Burrow. Crawford suggests that these 'gates' represent breaks in hedgerows,<sup>26</sup> yet it is likely they are related to more substantial boundaries. *Straet Geat*, located in the south-east corner of the Great Bedwyn estate, for example, is the point where the Roman road from *Cunetio* to *Venta Belgarum* (Winchester) passes through a possible stretch of dyke, identified by Major and Burrow.<sup>27</sup>

As with the dubious stretch from Maes Knoll to the Severn, reference to the Bedwyn Dyke in association with Woden occurs in the parish of Ham, where Old Dyke Lane is referred to on a Common Award map of 1733 as Wans Dyke.<sup>28</sup>

### *Dating Wansdyke: A Review of the Evidence*

The dating of Wansdyke is less secure than is often presumed. Linear boundary dykes are widely attested in the British landscape, in both upland and lowland regions, although the limited attention that they have received relative to other monuments is testimony to the often considerable difficulties of placing them in time and space. For most writers a late or sub-Roman date is accepted for Wansdyke, yet this is unproven and arguably reflects a long-running tradition in British field archaeology of ascribing such a date to substantial linear earthworks not otherwise placed in the later prehistoric period, such as those on the Tabular Hills of north-east Yorkshire.<sup>29</sup> Elsewhere, linear earthworks like the South Oxfordshire Grim's

<sup>24</sup> Major and Burrow, *Mystery of Wansdyke*, p.380.

<sup>25</sup> Numbers preceded by 'S' refer to catalogue entries in P. H. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters: An Annotated Hand List and Bibliography* (London, 1968).

<sup>26</sup> O. G. S. Crawford, 'The Anglo-Saxon Bounds of Bedwyn and Burbage', *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine*, 131 (1942), 280–301.

<sup>27</sup> Major and Burrow, *Mystery of Wansdyke*.

<sup>28</sup> Crawford, *Archaeology in the Field*, p.257.

<sup>29</sup> D. A. Spratt, *Linear Earthworks of the Tabular Hills, Northeast Yorkshire* (Sheffield, 1989).



Photo 2.2. The contributors walking Wansdyke, Orri Vésteinsson in the lead.  
Photo: Alex Langlands.

Ditch, initially claimed as sub-Roman, are also likely to be Iron Age, a date supported by archaeological excavation.<sup>30</sup> Longer chronologies for the construction, augmentation and alteration of major earthworks should also be given serious consideration. This factor is exemplified no more clearly than in the remodelling of Bokerley Dyke on the Wiltshire/Dorset border, a later prehistoric earthwork subjected to various alterations, including a late phase when the Dorchester to Old Sarum Roman road was cut through by a massive ditch at the point where it passes through the earthwork.<sup>31</sup>

Wansdyke has engaged distinguished antiquarians and archaeologists including Pitt-Rivers, Cyril and Aileen Fox, Albany Major and Edward Burrow, O. G. S.

<sup>30</sup> M. Hughes, 'Grimsditch and Cuthwulf's Expedition to the Chilterns in AD 571', *Antiquity*, 5 (1931), 291–314; R. Bradley, 'The South Oxfordshire Grim's Ditch and its Significance', *Oxoniensia*, 33 (1968), 1–13; J. Hinchliffe, 'Excavations at Grim's Ditch, Mongewell, 1974', *Oxoniensia*, 40 (1975), 122–35.

<sup>31</sup> H. C. Bowen, *The Archaeology of Bokerley Dyke*, ed. B. N. Eagles (London, 1990).

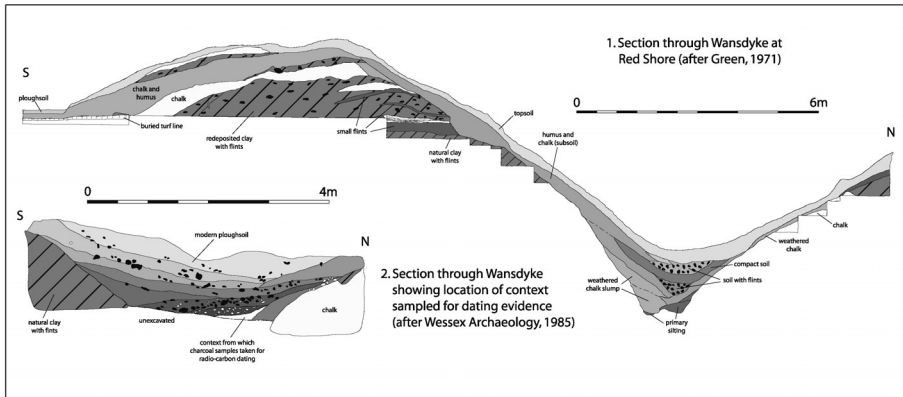


Figure 2.2. Sections through East Wansdyke after Colt Hoare, *Ancient History of Wiltshire*; Pitt-Rivers, *Excavations in Bokerly and Wansdyke Dorset and Wilts.*; Green, 'Wansdyke: Excavations 1966 to 1970'; and Wessex Archaeology (unpublished report, 1985).

Crawford and Tony Clark and more recently Peter Fowler; but fundamental questions relating to the origin of the dyke remain unresolved. John Aubrey first recognized that the western termination of East Wansdyke overlay the Roman Road on Morgan's Hill, thus demonstrating its Roman or later origin, at least at that point.

As early as the sixteenth century, Leland commented that the earthwork was built to separate the kingdoms of Wessex and Mercia, while Aubrey and Stukeley maintained conflicting views as to its date and origins.<sup>32</sup> Colte Hoare traced East Wansdyke beyond Savernake Forest, identifying stretches of bank and ditch on Aldermaston common near Silchester, although his search to the east of Inkpen was fruitless.<sup>33</sup>

Pitt-Rivers recognized that the only means to establish a chronology was targeted excavation. His two sections through East Wansdyke were cut at Old Shepherd's Shore and Brown's Barn (Fig. 2.2).<sup>34</sup> The first failed to retrieve dateable finds, although samian ware lay on the ground surface beneath the counter-scarp. The second section yielded samian ware and a late Roman sandal cleat from

<sup>32</sup> *The Itinerary of John Leland in or about the Years 1535–43*, ed. L. Toulmin Smith, 5 vols (Carbondale, 1964); J. Aubrey, *Monumenta Britannica* ([n.d.]); W. Stukeley, *Itinerarium Curiosum, Centuria*, 2 parts (London, 1776).

<sup>33</sup> Colte Hoare, *Ancient History of Wiltshire*.

<sup>34</sup> A. H. L. F. Pitt-Rivers, *Excavations in Bokerly and Wansdyke Dorset and Wilts. 1888–1891* (printed privately, 1892).

the ground surface sealed beneath the bank, thus providing a terminus post quem. Taylor identified our terminus ante quem by considering references to the dyke in tenth-century charters.<sup>35</sup> Taylor's consideration of the relationship between royal grants of land and the course of the dyke suggested to him a mid-seventh-century date for its construction.

Two major surveys of the monument in its entirety have been made. Major and Burrow's survey does not opt for a single period of construction, but serves as an overview of all possible periods.<sup>36</sup> Sir Cyril and Lady Fox undertook a full study of Wansdyke in the 1950s having previously undertaken similar surveys of Devil's Dyke, Cambridgeshire, and Offa's Dyke. Their 'Wansdyke Reconsidered' identifies 'minor' alignments of straight, sinuous and irregular earthwork and considers their relationship to local topography.<sup>37</sup> The article concludes with a series of bold summary points. The Bedwyn Dykes and East and West Wansdyke, they argue, are separate earthworks and thus there is no one moment in time when a frontier containing all three monuments was constructed.<sup>38</sup> References in charter bounds are thought to imply a pagan dedication, and construction dates for both stretches are related to the pagan Saxon period.<sup>39</sup>

Prior to the Foxes' work, O. G. S. Crawford's commentary on Wansdyke's eastern extent was written to counteract the influence of *The Mystery of Wansdyke* that he considered a 'bad book'.<sup>40</sup> Crawford began his survey at Maes Knoll and finished at the foot of Inkpen Beacon on the Wiltshire/Berkshire county boundary. Unlike the Foxes, Crawford considered East and West Wansdyke one and the same along with the Bedwyn Dyke.<sup>41</sup>

Contemporary with the Foxes' survey, A. J. Clark cut two sections through the Roman road at Spye Park, with a view to ascertaining the relationship between the dykes and the road that was thought to connect both stretches. Clark found no evidence for a bank and ditch in conjunction with the road and concurs with the Foxes' interpretation.<sup>42</sup> Myres summarizes these early contributions and reiterates

<sup>35</sup> Taylor, 'Date of Wansdyke'.

<sup>36</sup> Major and Burrow, *Mystery of Wansdyke*.

<sup>37</sup> Fox and Fox, 'Wansdyke Reconsidered'.

<sup>38</sup> Fox and Fox, 'Wansdyke Reconsidered', p.39.

<sup>39</sup> Fox and Fox, 'Wansdyke Reconsidered', p.45. See Hill and Worthington, *Offa's Dyke, History and Guide*, pp.145–47, for critique of the Foxes' survey of Offa's Dyke.

<sup>40</sup> Crawford, *Archaeology in the Field*.

<sup>41</sup> Crawford, *Archaeology in the Field*, p.257.

<sup>42</sup> Clark, 'Nature of Wansdyke', pp.95–96.

the Foxes' view.<sup>43</sup> Myres, however, questions both that the various stretches of upstanding earthwork are of different periods and the late sixth-century date for the construction of East Wansdyke. Although he introduces the 'origins of Wessex' as a conceptual tool, this is not developed further than the early seventh century.

Subsequently, excavations have been undertaken at Red Shore and New Buildings, and more recently just south of Marlborough at Wernham Farm in the modern parish of North Savernake during the laying of a pipeline.<sup>44</sup> Various sections cut through Wansdyke are shown in Figure 2.2. Environmental evidence suggests that the dyke at New Buildings lay in abundantly wooded surroundings, whilst on the downs at Red Shore there is evidence of plants characteristic of pasture.<sup>45</sup>

The full profile of the ditch at Wernham Farm was not revealed, although oak charcoal from a layer of flint rubble deposited near the base of the ditch yielded a radiocarbon date of cal. AD 890–1160 at 2 sigma (BM-2405). It is possible that the ditch had been cleaned out and further investigation is required. The course of the pipeline had been diverted to avoid upstanding sections of the bank, thus eliminating the opportunity to analyse sealed ground surfaces. The date and section are published here for the first time.

Eagles considers worm action and, citing A. J. Clark *in litt.*, argues that, at a rate of 4 cm for every ten years, it would have taken some fifty years for the discarded finds to reach the stratigraphic levels they achieved in Pitt-Rivers's excavations.<sup>46</sup> Discussion of the Bedwyn Dykes in the publication of the archaeological research on the Romano-British *villa*\* at Castle Copse, Great Bedwyn, argues that they are not part of the Wansdyke complex but correspond with late Roman activity in the region.<sup>47</sup> Fowler's recent survey of East Wansdyke as part of the Fyfield and Overton Downs project concluded that it was 'An unfinished Roman Military Earthwork for a Non-event'.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>43</sup> J. N. L. Myres, 'Wansdyke and the Origin of Wessex', in *Essays in British History*, ed. H. R. Trevor-Roper (London, 1964), pp.1–27.

<sup>44</sup> H. S. Green, 'Wansdyke: Excavations 1966 to 1970', *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine*, 67 (1971), 129–46.

<sup>45</sup> G. W. Dimbleby contributing to Green, 'Wansdyke: Excavations 1966 to 1970', p.136.

<sup>46</sup> B. N. Eagles, 'Evidence for Settlement in the Fifth to Seventh Centuries AD', in *The Medieval Landscape of Wessex*, ed. M. Aston and C. Lewis, Oxbow Monograph, 46 (Oxford, 1994), pp.13–32 (pp.23–24).

<sup>47</sup> Hostetter and Howe, *Romano-British Villa at Castle Copse*, pp.359–67.

<sup>48</sup> Fowler, 'Wansdyke in the Woods'.

*Territory, Warfare and Politics: The Context of Wansdyke*

There are numerous reasons for placing Wansdyke in a later period based both on a reassessment of earlier approaches to dating and by examining in detail its relationship to patterns of settlement and land use from the late Roman period onwards. Bonney argued that the dyke was laid over existing estates on the basis that parish boundaries, including several parcels of land described in charter bounds, bear little if any relationship to the course of the earthwork (Fig. 2.3).<sup>49</sup> Indeed, a series of long, narrow estates, typical of downland and vale landscapes terminate on the high chalk, yet they do not respect East Wansdyke, nor are they respected by it. Small projections of land belonging to estates both north and south of the earthwork give every indication of a complex pattern of landscape development. Bonney argued for a potentially Roman or even earlier date for these estates with Wansdyke built without regard to their form. In other words, while there is no logistical sense in a monumental earthwork following a network of boundaries of local significance, one might expect estates post-dating the dyke to utilize it as a boundary feature. West Wansdyke exhibits a similar relationship to parish boundaries.

There are indications that the estates in question are later in origin than proposed by Bonney. In the first instance, along the course of the Roman road between the two stretches of dyke, parish boundaries respect the road in every case except at Chittoe (Wiltshire), a land unit which may have Roman origins and within which partly lay the small Roman town of *Verlucio* (Fig. 2.3).<sup>50</sup> Clearly the pattern of estates post-dates the Roman road, yet by how much? Current thinking places the development of villages and estates (by the twelfth century, parishes) between the later ninth and twelfth centuries.<sup>51</sup> Evidence for this view is derived largely from charters granting small parcels of land almost frenetically during the central decades of the tenth century, with far fewer grants of earlier and later date.<sup>52</sup> Archaeology has revealed a similar chronological horizon with regard to

<sup>49</sup> D. Bonney, 'Early Boundaries in Wessex', in *Archaeology and the Landscape*, ed. P. J. Fowler (London, 1972), pp.168–86.

<sup>50</sup> Bonney, 'Early Boundaries in Wessex', pp.176–78; A. J. Reynolds, 'From Pagus to Parish: Territory and Settlement in the Avebury Region from the Late Roman Period to the Domesday Survey', in *The Avebury Landscape: Aspects of the Field Archaeology of the Marlborough Downs*, ed. G. Brown, D. Field and D. McOmish (Oxford, 2005), pp.164–80.

<sup>51</sup> D. Hooke, *The Landscape of Anglo-Saxon England* (Leicester, 1998).

<sup>52</sup> D. Hill, *An Atlas of Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1981), Fig. 36 (p.26).

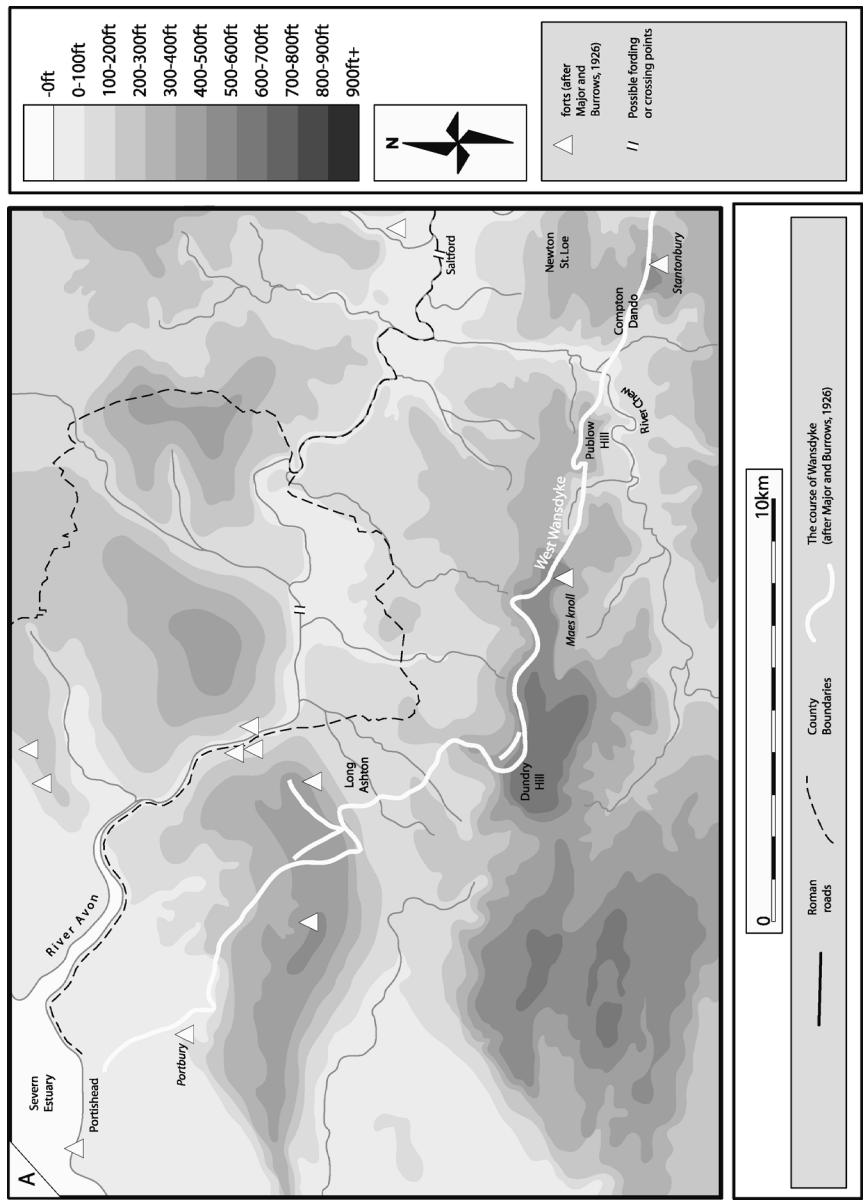


Figure 2.3. The course of the Wansdyke frontier: a) West Wansdyke.

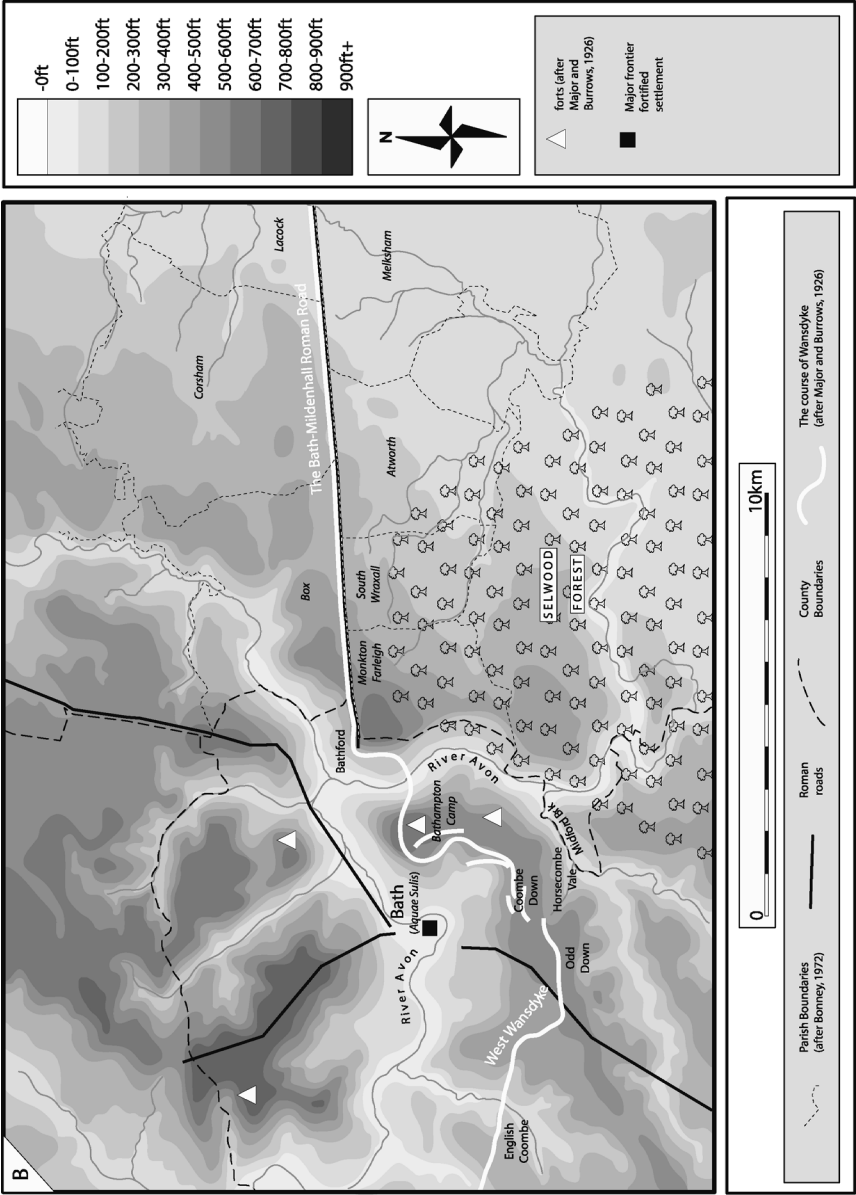


Figure 2.3. The course of the Wansdyke frontier: b) the Bath-Mildenhall Roman road.



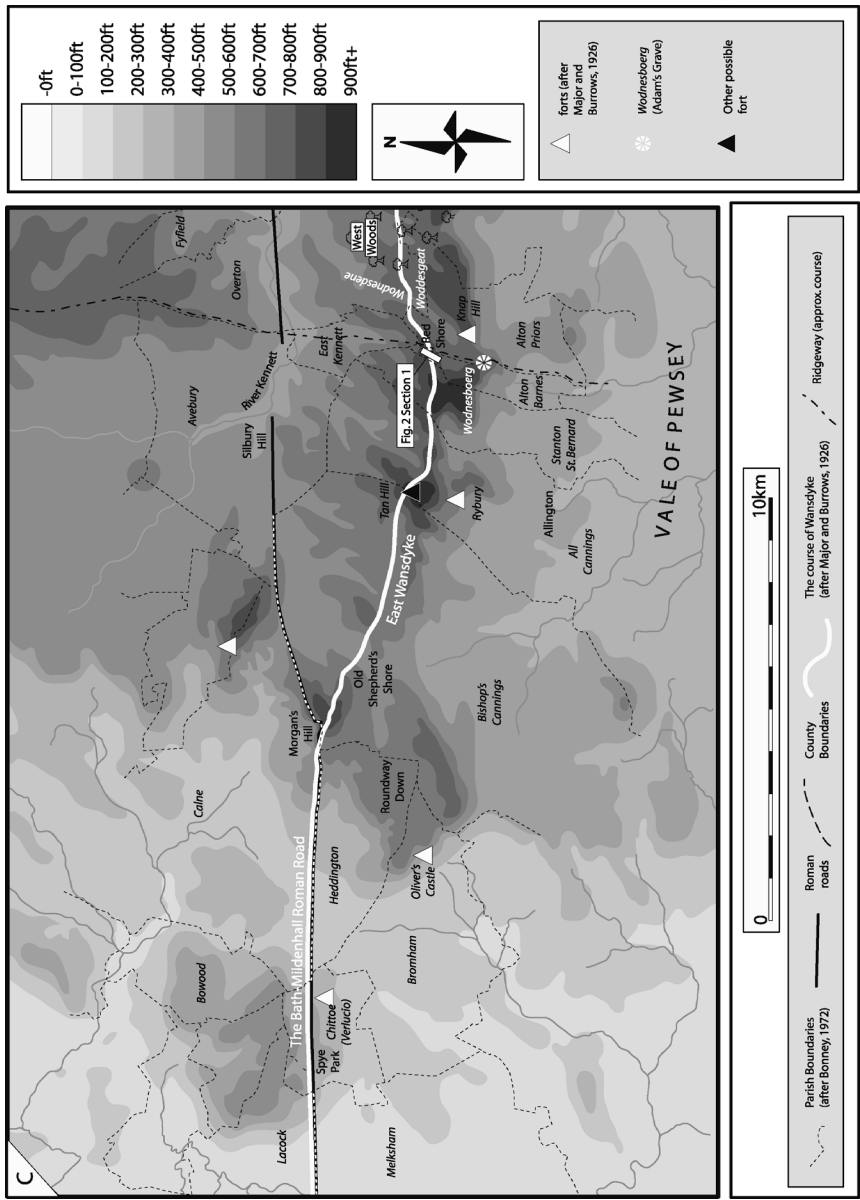


Figure 2.3. The course of the Wansdyke frontier: c) East Wansdyke.

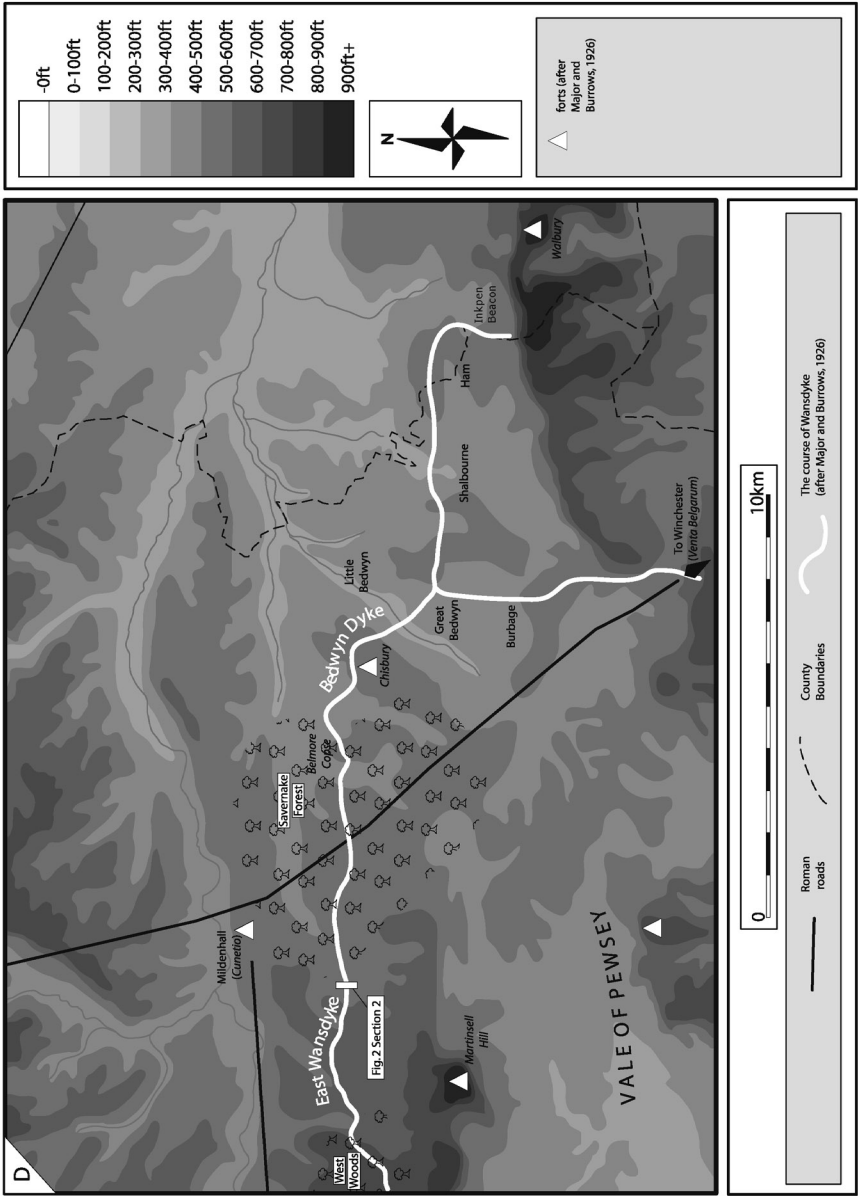


Figure 2.3. The course of the Wansdyke frontier: d) the Bedwyn Dykes.

the emergence of enclosed 'thegnly' residences, with a hall (often aisled), associated church and settlement.<sup>53</sup>

On closer inspection the local picture is more complex than that indicated by national overview, and for both Wiltshire and Somerset there are eighth- and ninth-century grants that describe in topographical terms parcels of land that compare closely with the apparent economic determination behind the estate morphology of later grants. The likelihood here, then, is that Wansdyke is indeed later than the estates it traverses, as Bonney suggested, yet the latter are very likely middle Anglo-Saxon creations at the earliest. A topic that requires further research is whether late Anglo-Saxon estates were freshly described when granted by charter or whether they represent instead the component parts of middle Anglo-Saxon 'multiple' or 'complex' estates. The latter view, coupled with a later dating for Wansdyke, raises interesting questions with regard to the origins of estates and their continuity at a local level either side of the construction of the dyke in physical and chronological terms.

It is unfortunate that no document earlier than 903 describes either the East or West sections of the earthwork. Wansdyke is not mentioned explicitly by Bede, nor is it found in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. In 1924 Passmore brought attention to Gildas's reference to a turf wall built from sea to sea, while Bede makes a fleeting but specific reference to an 'earthwork', fortified by a series of towers constructed by Severus, that stretched from sea to sea.<sup>54</sup> Fowler takes this to be consistent with Wansdyke concluding that the frontier was unfinished, while Hill and Worthington consider its relevance to Offa's Dyke.<sup>55</sup>

Entries in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle relate battles at *wodnesbeorg* (now Adam's Grave) *s.a.* 592 and 716.<sup>56</sup> The battle site itself is the massive Neolithic chambered tomb just south of East Wansdyke and alongside the Ridgeway. Identification of the place as that of the battles is substantiated by a reference to

<sup>53</sup> A. J. Reynolds, 'Boundaries and Settlements in Later Sixth to Eleventh-Century England', in *Boundaries in Early Medieval Britain*, ed. D. Griffiths, A. J. Reynolds and S. Semple (Oxford, 2003), pp.98–136.

<sup>54</sup> A. D. Passmore, 'The Age and Origin of the Wansdyke', *Antiquaries Journal*, 4 (1924), 26–29; Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969), I.5.

<sup>55</sup> P. J. Fowler, *Landscape Plotted and Pieced: Landscape History and Local Archaeology in Fyfield and Overton, Wiltshire* (London, 2000), p.196; Fowler, 'Wansdyke in the Woods', pp.196–97; Hill and Worthington, *Offa's Dyke, History and Guide*, pp.103–05.

<sup>56</sup> J. E. B. Gover and others, *The Place Names of Wiltshire* (Cambridge, 1939), p.318; *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, ed. Swanton, pp.20–21.

the barrow as *wodnesbeorg* in tenth-century bounds appended to a (probably conflated) charter of 825 for Alton Priors (S272).

While the Alton estate is one of those 'clipped' by East Wansdyke it remains to consider the significance of the name and whether the barrow is named from the earthwork or vice versa. It is plausible on several grounds that the latter is the case. As noted above, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle records the barrow as the site of battles in 592 and 716, events that took place long before its completion, although the Chronicle is increasingly reliable in its accounts from c.850.<sup>57</sup> If we are to accept the reliability of the earlier event and, indeed, the location of the site, then any later projected date of construction and naming of the dyke might logically reflect the major battles fought on the frontier. Equally, the conjoining of a mythical ancestor with both barrow and dyke might have been made independently.

The first battle was ostensibly fought between Britons and Saxons, while the later event was a skirmish between Mercians and West Saxons and is more likely to have actually happened.<sup>58</sup> The locality also saw two documented battles in the early eleventh century when the Vikings were active in the region at Kennet (1006), on the Ridgeway just south of Avebury, and at Cannings Marsh (1010), most likely as it was close to Allington (OE *Atheling's tun* or 'prince's farm'), perhaps a royal tax collection centre and a ready supply of provisions for the raiding army.

The name of the barrow is also suggestive of a pre-Christian cult site; the coincidence of cult and warfare is a matter of not inconsiderable interest. For the name of an earthwork in a neighbouring county (Somerset) to be reflected by that of a barrow many miles to the east is a further matter of significance, implying a strongly ideologically imbued concept of a major frontier. The course of the Ridgeway north of *wodnesbeorg* runs along a valley floor known from charter evidence as *wodnesdene* and through a break in the earthwork itself termed *woddesgeat* (S449; S272). These Woden names, based on those of the barrow and dyke, underscore the sense of place of this major waypoint for travellers into southern England, where the Great Ridgeway crosses a boundary of formerly great importance and where a series of battles had been fought. Effectively, the locale around *wodnesbeorg* was an early medieval 'hot-spot', its special character determined by the coincidence of monuments, communications and politics.

<sup>57</sup> J. M. Bately, 'The Compilation of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, 60 BC to AD 890: Vocabulary as Evidence', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 64 (1978), 93–127.

<sup>58</sup> *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, ed. Swanton, p.42, n.3.

A seventh-century silver gilt pyramidal stud, inlaid with niello, found 'near Adam's Grave' is probably a sword fitting.<sup>59</sup> It is tantalizing to think that the barrow might also have acted as a high-status burial place during the seventh century as is known in the region at Swallowcliffe Down and Roundway Down, both of which also reused prehistoric barrows.<sup>60</sup> The likelihood that such high-status burials were also of 'sentinel' type, placed at territorial limits, bears serious consideration here and brings to mind the group of seventh-century finds from Silchester indicative of another high-status burial along the line of our proposed frontier (see below).<sup>61</sup>

The place-name Wansdyke or 'Woden's Ditch' has generated much discussion. In virtually every article published it is either implicit or stated that construction of the dyke is earlier than AD 600.<sup>62</sup> This appears to be due to historical references to the activities of entrepreneurial Anglo-Saxon princes and the conversion of Wessex to Christianity from AD 634. Recent studies of early chronicle references urge extreme caution in using them as a means to construct historical chronologies.<sup>63</sup> It is also apparent that certain pagan place-names might be fabrications of tenth-century Christian propaganda.<sup>64</sup> Aubrey, in his *Monumenta Britannica*, remarks how the name caused local people to conclude erroneously that it was named because the 'Divell' erected it upon a Wednesday. Oman's assertion that, ignorant of its origins, the Saxons called it after their ancestral god, as a maker of all things marvellous, is dismissed as naive by Fox and Fox because it is improbable that such a 'sacred' name should be given by the Saxons to an obsolete defence.<sup>65</sup>

The establishment of the See of Dorchester in AD 634–35 and subsequent conversion of Wessex has served as a terminus ante quem for the construction of

<sup>59</sup> P. Robinson, 'The Treasure Act', *Trilithon*, 46 (2002), 3.

<sup>60</sup> S. Semple, 'Burials and Political Boundaries in the Avebury Region, North Wiltshire', in *Boundaries in Early Medieval Britain*, ed. Griffiths, Reynolds and Semple, pp.72–91.

<sup>61</sup> G. C. Boon, 'The Latest Objects from Silchester, Hants.', *Medieval Archaeology*, 3 (1959), 79–88 (p.83).

<sup>62</sup> Myres, 'Wansdyke and the Origin of Wessex'; Bonney, 'Early Boundaries in Wessex', p.174; L. Alcock, *Arthur's Britain: History and Archaeology AD 367–634* (London, 1971), p.349.

<sup>63</sup> B. A. E. Yorke, 'Fact or Fiction? The Written Evidence of the 5th and 6th Centuries AD', in *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*, vol. VI (Oxford, 1993), pp.45–50.

<sup>64</sup> S. Semple, 'A Fear of the Past: The Place of the Prehistoric Burial Mound in the Ideology of Middle and Later Anglo-Saxon England', *World Archaeology*, 30 (1998), 109–26.

<sup>65</sup> C. Oman, 'Wansdyke', *Archaeological Journal*, 87 (1930), 60–70 (p.69); Fox and Fox, 'Wansdyke Reconsidered', p.40.

the dyke. Even Taylor, opting for a mid- to late seventh-century date, suggests that Christianity could hardly have, by then, become widespread among the West Saxons, arguing that the name 'Woden' would have had perceived influence for its constructors as the protector of boundaries.<sup>66</sup> Major, however, argues that little evidence exists in northern mythology to associate Woden, or indeed Mercury, with boundaries.<sup>67</sup>

The most recent consideration suggests that only in the context of a 'joke' would Christian West Saxon builders have named the dyke so. For Fowler, the attribution of a pagan name 'Woden' can only indicate a pre-Christian origin for the monument yet, as one of us has noted previously, Woden was a 'live' figure in Christian Anglo-Saxon England appearing, as he does, in King Alfred's genealogy not as a god but as an ancestor.<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, the evidence of the tenth-century charters shows beyond doubt that clerics producing boundary descriptions were not troubled with such nomenclature. The name of the earthworks is undoubtedly highly significant. They are the only such linear earthworks to be so-named, an observation that is made all the more striking by their association. That the name survived into the tenth century indicates at least a memory that the dykes were once considered as elements of a common boundary line. The reference to Woden may have been connected with a desire to name the frontier after a heroic ancestor, deeply rooted in the familial traditions of the West Saxon royal house. Barbara Yorke, drawing on work by Dorothy Whitelock, has raised the possibility that the eighth-century King Offa of Mercia may have been christened so as to associate him with the heroic ancestor of the same name (himself a descendant of Woden in the so-called 'Anglian Collection').<sup>69</sup> Yorke also identifies a possible link between textual references to the heroic Offa in *Beowulf* and *Widsith*, with an inference to the creation of a boundary in the latter perhaps alluding to the later King Offa's dyke.<sup>70</sup> Parallels with Wansdyke are clear.

The length of the boundary as described by both stretches of earthwork with the Roman road between also raises major objections to a Roman or sub-Roman

<sup>66</sup> Taylor, 'Date of Wansdyke', p.152.

<sup>67</sup> Major and Burrow, *Mystery of Wansdyke*, p.133.

<sup>68</sup> Fowler, 'Wansdyke in the Woods', p.196; J. Pollard and A. J. Reynolds, *Avebury: The Biography of a Landscape* (Stroud, 2002), pp.187–89.

<sup>69</sup> B. A. E. Yorke, 'The Origins of Mercia', in *Mercia: An Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe*, ed. M. P. Brown and C. A. Farr (London, 2001), pp.13–22 (p.16); D. M. Whitelock, *The Audience of Beowulf* (Oxford, 1951), pp.58–64.

<sup>70</sup> Yorke, 'Origins of Mercia', p.16.

date. While a much longer frontier can be suggested (see below), even the widely accepted stretch must relate to an extensive polity. Eagles and Fowler have suggested sub-Roman elites as the builders (see above). The line of the frontier contrasts with the suggested Roman administrative geography (*civitas*\* boundaries), although Eagles suggests that the boundary between the Dobunni and the Belgae may have run close to the line of East Wansdyke.<sup>71</sup> The settlement archaeology of the corridor of the frontier reveals virtually no evidence for fifth-century occupation, and not the faintest trace of an infrastructure capable of instituting a monumental public work traversing southern England from the Bristol Avon to the Inkpen Beacon and perhaps much further east as originally conceived.

Eagles's work on fifth- to seventh-century material in the region has established a clear division in northern Wiltshire between material culture of Germanic character found to the east of a north-south line running broadly though Avebury, and finds and place-names of British type to the west.<sup>72</sup> Eagles suggests an extensive territory, based on Bath, itself only 2 km north of West Wansdyke, while to the east a contemporary unit, potentially that of a group termed the *Canningas* is proposed for the Avebury region.<sup>73</sup> The proximity of West Wansdyke to Bath and the probability that the *Canningas* unit included territory on both sides of East Wansdyke indicates that the monument was built following a post-Roman phase of medium-sized territories. That East Wansdyke cuts across Eagles's zone of cultural contrast rather than following it yet further strengthens a later dating. Overall, the extent of the Wansdyke frontier suggests that the growth and consolidation of the West Saxon kingdom provides a more plausible historical context for its construction.

North Somerset, North Wiltshire and Berkshire were hotly contended during the enlargement of the West Saxon and Mercian kingdoms, and the 716 event is significant in terms of placing the Wansdyke frontier within this era. There is a general consensus that Wansdyke is unfinished. Echoing David Hill, Fowler suggests that the earthworks are 'a mature, planned response', the need for which may have subsided during the course of its construction.<sup>74</sup> The struggle for territory between the Mercians and West Saxons provides several 'windows' when such a project might quickly become redundant.

<sup>71</sup> M. Millet, *The Romanisation of Britain* (Cambridge, 1990); B. N. Eagles, 'Anglo-Saxon Presence and Culture in Wiltshire', in *Roman Wiltshire and After*, ed. Ellis, pp.199–233.

<sup>72</sup> Eagles, 'Anglo-Saxon Presence', p.208, Fig. 11:2.

<sup>73</sup> Reynolds, 'From Pagus to Parish'.

<sup>74</sup> Fowler, 'Wansdyke in the Woods', p.192.

The termination of East Wansdyke at the junction of the boundaries of Berkshire, Hampshire and Wiltshire at Inkpen Beacon implies a relationship. The suggested course west of Maes Knoll is used by, or otherwise runs virtually parallel to, the shire boundary. The continuation of the boundary of Berkshire in an easterly direction along what would be the ideal line for a continuing bank and ditch deserves further enquiry. Whilst the 'Men of Somerset' and the 'Men of Wiltshire' had been pressed into constructing dykes, perhaps the 'Men of Hampshire' either failed to pull their weight or the need for it had passed. This interpretation implies that Wansdyke represents military organization based on the shire system or at least post-dating the shire boundaries (see below).

While we have presented part of our case for a middle Anglo-Saxon date for the Wansdyke frontier in its entirety, precisely when it came into being and how long it lasted are questions that remain unanswered. Competition for territory between the West Saxons and Mercians from the late seventh to the ninth centuries is complex, yet poorly documented in the grand narrative sources. The principal type of evidence from which to assess the pace and extent of overlordship exercised in the region by either polity are the series of grants relating to the foundation or endowment of religious houses, in particular those at Abingdon, Bath, Cookham and Malmesbury.

The West Saxons controlled Surrey in the 680s (as evidenced by Cædwalla's Farnham charter, S235), Kent by 694 (under Ine), along with Sussex between 690 and 710 and apparently Devon by 722, when Ine's men were fighting the Cornish.<sup>75</sup> Ine granted land at Streatley in Berkshire between 688 and 690 (S252), although there is no evidence that he ever controlled old West Saxon lands in the Dorchester-on-Thames region.

A further indication of West Saxon dominance in Berkshire in the later seventh century is provided by the foundation of Abingdon abbey, apparently by a West Saxon King Cissa in the late seventh century.<sup>76</sup> By contrast, the nunnery at Bath was founded by a grant made by an underking of the Hwicce, Osric, c.675 (S51). It may be no coincidence that West Wansdyke runs south of Bath and, arguably, the shire boundary was moved to the north of Bath after it passed into West Saxon hands in the tenth century. Overall, territorial claims between the two kingdoms appear less geographically significant along the western part of the

<sup>75</sup> F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd edn (Oxford, 1971), pp.68–73.

<sup>76</sup> F. M. Stenton, *The Early History of the Abbey of Abingdon* (Reading, 1913), pp.9–18 and 49.



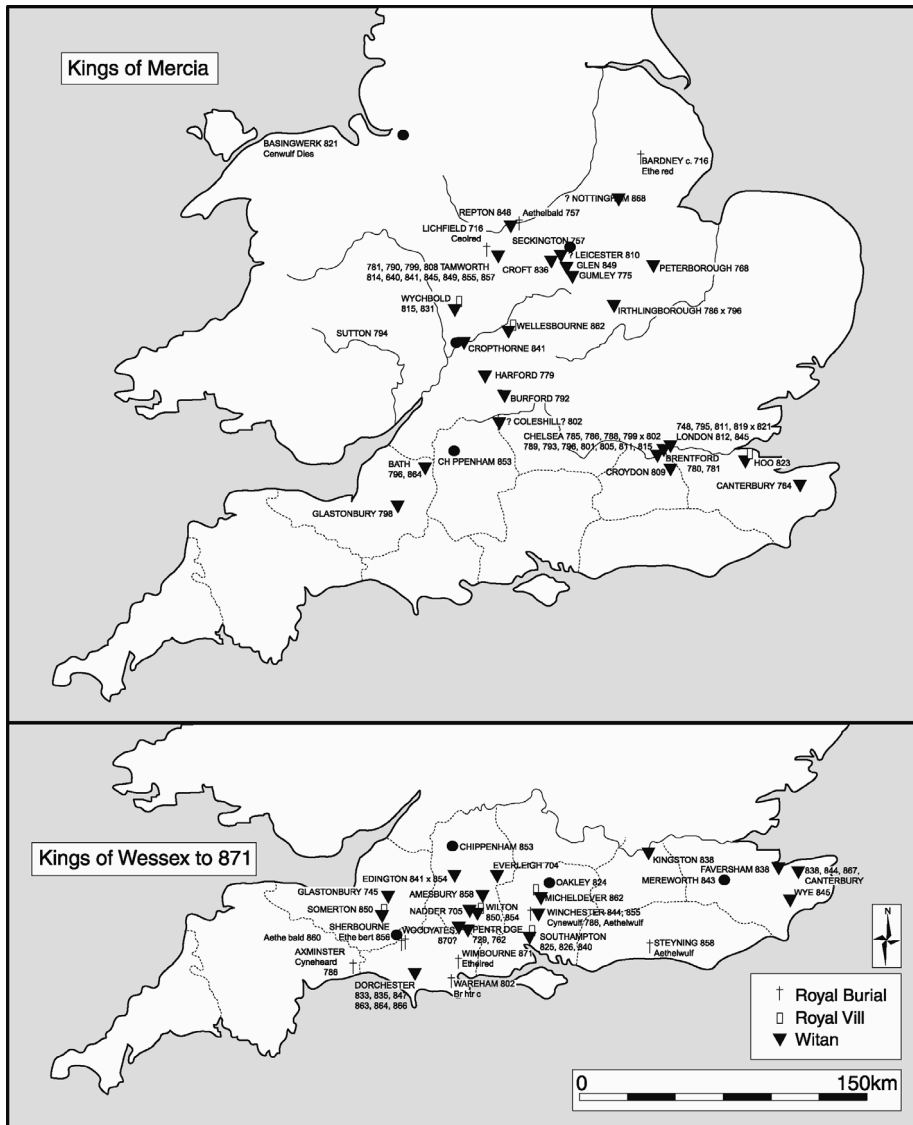
frontier than further to the east where both northern Wiltshire and Berkshire witnessed a series of land grants by Mercian kings, including the estate at Long Newton (Wiltshire), which was given to Malmesbury abbey in 681 (S73). Estates in Gloucestershire at Somerford Keynes and Tetbury, both close to the border with Wiltshire, were granted to Malmesbury under Mercian auspices in the 680s (S71; S1169). Throughout the eighth century the Mercians apparently dominated Berkshire. Following Offa's defeat of Cynwulf in 779 at Bensington, the shire remained under Mercian overlordship for about seventy years.<sup>77</sup> We suggest that this period provides a clearer social and political context for the Wansdyke frontier than arguments presented to date. It remains to be demonstrated whether this is indeed the case, although the period following Ine's domination of southern England and the apparent West Saxon foundation of Abingdon and perhaps, more precisely, the immediate period following the West Saxon defeat at Bensington, deserve serious consideration.

By 850 diocesan geography followed the northern boundaries of Somerset, Wiltshire and Berkshire, while the post-Danelaw reorganizations saw just Wiltshire and Berkshire united by the creation of the See of Ramsbury in 909. Viewed on this scale it is possible to visualize how north Wiltshire and west Berkshire at least stand out as a cohesive topographical area, defined by downland. Indeed, David Hill's map of places visited by Mercian kings up to 871 shows only one location, Glastonbury (798), south of our projected frontier, while to the north royal visitations come close to the line (Fig. 2.4).<sup>78</sup> Similarly, Hill's mapping of the itineraries of West Saxon kings up to 871 shows only Chippenham north of our suggested frontier (Fig. 2.4).<sup>79</sup> Both Mercian and West Saxon kings were present at Chippenham in 853 for the marriage of King Æthelwulf's daughter to King Burhgræd of Mercia, following their joint campaign against the Welsh in the same year (*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle s.a.* 853). In a diplomatic and administrative sense our view of the Wansdyke frontier as a major political boundary, however short-lived, is corroborated, bearing in mind that such distribution maps lack the details and circumstances of individual visits over a long period.

<sup>77</sup> Stenton, *Early History of the Abbey of Abingdon*, p.50.

<sup>78</sup> Hill, *Atlas of Anglo-Saxon England*, p.83, fig. 145.

<sup>79</sup> Hill, *Atlas of Anglo-Saxon England*, p.83, fig. 146.



*The Administrative Background to the Wansdyke Frontier*

Charter material, chronicle references and other Anglo-Saxon diplomatic have been mined regarding the nature of military obligation and drafting labour, and taxation from the eighth to eleventh centuries.<sup>80</sup> Hill's comparison of existing earthworks with projected lengths based on the Burghal Hidage assessments shows a remarkable correlation.<sup>81</sup> Although of early tenth-century date, the Burghal Hidage is thought to relate to a scheme of national defence implemented by King Alfred.<sup>82</sup> It relates to the assessment and/or upkeep of thirty-three fortifications (*burhs*\*) in southern England, broadly demarcating the extent of West Saxon power between AD 911 and 919.

Attached to each fort is a hidage assessment ranging from 2400 **hides**\* for Wallingford to as few as 100 for Lyng, Somerset. Of relevance here is the 'Calculation' appended to one surviving version.<sup>83</sup> Stating the ratio of men required to construct and/or maintain stretches of earthwork, the document specifies four men for the construction of a 'perch' of earthwork (English perch = 5.5 yards, Germanic perch = 5.16 yards). Thus, the projected lengths of fort walls could be deduced from the hidage assessments granted to each. Hill set about applying this theory to archaeological reality and met with a surprising degree of success.<sup>84</sup> With the exception of Bath, Chichester and Exeter (most likely owing to the fact that these had existing Roman walls), the actual lengths of fort walls came within a 5% margin of error from those projected from Burghal Hidage assessments.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>80</sup> N. P. Brooks, 'The Development of Military Obligations in Eighth- and Ninth-Century England', in *England before the Conquest*, ed. P. Clemoes and K. Hughes (Cambridge, 1971), pp.69–84; N. P. Brooks, 'England in the Ninth-Century: The Crucible of Defeat', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, 29 (1979), 1–20; N. P. Brooks, 'The Administrative Background to the Burghal Hidage', in *The Defence of Wessex: The Burghal Hidage and Anglo-Saxon Fortifications*, ed. D. Hill and A. R. Rumble (Manchester, 1996), pp.128–50.

<sup>81</sup> D. Hill, 'The Burghal Hidage: The Establishment of a Text', *Medieval Archaeology*, 13 (1969), 84–92.

<sup>82</sup> M. Biddle, 'Towns', in *The Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. D. M. Wilson (London, 1976), pp.91–150 (p.124).

<sup>83</sup> D. Hill, 'The Calculation and the Purpose of the Burghal Hidage', in *Defence of Wessex*, ed. Hill and Rumble, pp.92–97.

<sup>84</sup> Hill, 'Burghal Hidage: The Establishment of a Text'.

<sup>85</sup> Hill, *Atlas of Anglo-Saxon England*, p.85.

Burghal Hidage forts are so regularly spaced and accurately reflexive of their dependent hinterlands that this 'scheme' fits with what is known of the administrative capabilities of King Alfred. Yet, was Alfred drawing from and revising an existing system? Did this levy, providing the exact ratio of men to fort wall, have its origins in an earlier period? In *Beowulf*, for example, Hrothgar summons men from far and wide to adorn the wallsteads of his palace at Heorot.<sup>86</sup> Is this a poetic echo of the reality of the Burghal Hidage? *Beowulf* is now promoted as an eighth-century work again.<sup>87</sup>

Contemporary with Alfred, Charles the Bald issued a series of capitularies as part of his Edict of Pîtres (880s) calling for the construction of fortresses and bridges along with guard duty in his Frankish realms 'according to the ancient custom and that of other peoples'. Charles maintained a diplomatic mission in England headed by the port-reeve of Quentovic and would have been no stranger to English military activity.<sup>88</sup>

Charter evidence shows that Mercian kings were exacting a similar levy in the eighth century.<sup>89</sup> The *Trinoda Necessitas* comprised three common obligations: service in the *fyrd* (military service), work on bridges, and the construction of fortifications.<sup>90</sup> Although found in a spurious charter of King Cædwalla of Wessex (AD 680 x 688) the first genuine reference features in a charter of Offa to his *minister* Æthelmund (793 x 796, S139). They describe necessary labours from which no one might be excused.<sup>91</sup> These services are first required in response to the Danish threat in charters of the Mercian Kings Cenwulf (811, S168) and Ceolwulf (822, S186). The first explicit West Saxon reference to military obligations is dated 847 in a charter of King Æthelwulf (S298).

Charter evidence suggests that obligations to undertake public works of defence existed before the reign of King Alfred. To what extent, however, did Alfred adapt these to suit his system? If the origins of 'boroughwork' and the *Trinoda Necessitas* lie in the eighth century, as the Mercian charters demonstrate, can the same be argued for the ratio of four men for every perch? That the Calcu-

<sup>86</sup> *Beowulf*, ed. J. Alexander (Harmondsworth, 1978), p.37.

<sup>87</sup> M. Lapidge, 'The Archetype of Beowulf', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 29 (2000), 5–41.

<sup>88</sup> D. G. Russo, *Town Origins and Development in Early England, c. 400–950 A.D.* (Westport, CN, 1998), p.207.

<sup>89</sup> Brooks, 'Development of Military Obligations'.

<sup>90</sup> W. H. Stevenson, 'Trinoda Necessitas', *English Historical Review*, 29 (1914), 689–702.

<sup>91</sup> Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, pp.286–87.

lation is attached to only one of the surviving versions of the Burghal Hidage suggests that it may be of separate diplomatic identity, unrelated in origin to the list of forts.<sup>92</sup> Hill has demonstrated the merits of isolating the Calculation from the Burghal Hidage by applying it to Offa's Dyke.<sup>93</sup>

Can the Calculation be applied to Wansdyke or to the two sections of earthworks? What size of labour force and land unit would be required to construct, for example, the most continuous stretch of earthwork, at 19.5 km, from Morgan's Hill to New Buildings? This distance equates to approximately 21,500 yards. With the Calculation in mind, such a distance divides into approximately 3900 English perches (5.5 yards). With four men required for each perch, the requisite number of hides is 15,600. Burghal Hidage totals for Hampshire (3520), Dorset (3060), Somerset (2613), Wiltshire (4800) and Devon (1534 with Cornwall, perhaps an externally enforced but nominal levy), when combined, provide a grand total for Wessex of 15,527 hides.

Of course, juggling figures can result in a convincing correlation between defensive monument and territorial context, but what we have attempted to show is that construction of the earthworks of the Wansdyke frontier required military organization on a scale equivalent to that of the burghal system of the late ninth and tenth centuries. When viewed in such a light, Wansdyke seems less isolated from its kindred artefacts, Offa's Dyke and the Burghal Hidage forts.

### *The Development of Settlement in a Frontier Zone*

Patterns of settlement provide further valuable insights into the changing nature of the delineation of communities from the late Roman period. While not a single Roman-period estate in England can be mapped on the ground, the distribution of settlements known archaeologically reveals a dense and stratified pattern based on *villas*\*, some with outlying farms, upland settlements and small towns. With regard to East Wansdyke, the settlement pattern to the south of the dyke is one of regularly spaced farms on the chalk scarp facing south but close to the dyke itself. To the north there is extensive settlement around Avebury, along the Kennet valley to the east and on the west-facing scarp of the Marlborough

<sup>92</sup> A. R. Rumble, 'Diplomatic Sub Sections', in *Defence of Wessex*, ed. Hill and Rumble, pp.69–74 (p.70).

<sup>93</sup> Hill, 'Construction of Offa's Dyke', p.142; Hill and Worthington, *Offa's Dyke, History and Guide*, pp.116–18.

Downs.<sup>94</sup> Very few of these sites have revealed early medieval activity and then only in the form of a few sherds of chaff-tempered pottery which has a fifth- to tenth-century date range in the region. Although the late Roman farm on Over-ton Down excavated by Peter Fowler has revealed high-status occupation into the early fifth century, evidence for the continuity of the Roman settlement pattern beyond that period is non-existent.<sup>95</sup>

The lack of influence of Roman towns on the later pattern of urban centres is illuminating. As described above, at its maximum extent the Wansdyke frontier arguably runs from Avonmouth near Bristol to the southern boundary of Berkshire, which is itself a creation of a top-down planning measure running in a more or less straight line to the county boundary with Surrey and the River Thames. One of the most distinctive features of this corridor is the consistent failure of Roman towns along its length (with the exception of Bath) to develop into post-Roman towns, as is common in other regions. From *Abonae* (Sea Mills near Bristol) through *Verlucio* (Sandy Lane near Calne), the newly discovered Roman small town at the foot of Silbury Hill (near Avebury), *Cunetio* (near Marlborough), and indeed *Calleva Atrebatum* (Silchester) on the Berkshire/Hampshire border, former Roman centres apparently entered terminal decline at the end of that period. *Verlucio*, the Silbury settlement and *Cunetio* failed, yet they were replaced by three more or less equally spaced small towns by the tenth century. This aspect demonstrates at least that the physical geography of Roman central places was fundamentally changed between the two periods.

### *Major Early Medieval Frontiers*

A profitable approach is to consider how Wansdyke compares with the form and extent of other major frontiers. An obvious parallel can be drawn with the Antonine Wall in southern Scotland, of the mid-second century, a short-lived frontier built of turf on a stone base.<sup>96</sup> Clearly there is a Roman milieu within which such a boundary feature can be fitted. By contrast, however, the Wansdyke frontier incorporates features of a varied character: earthworks, roads and major topographical features such as watercourses. Early medieval parallels are close to hand.

<sup>94</sup> Pollard and Reynolds, *Avebury: The Biography of a Landscape*, p.154, Fig. 63.

<sup>95</sup> Fowler, *Landscape Plotted and Pieced*, p.104.

<sup>96</sup> P. Salway, *Roman Britain* (Oxford, 1981), pp.194–202.

Offa's Dyke is no longer seen as a continuous earthwork, but as part of a boundary that incorporated woodland, waterways and other topographical features.<sup>97</sup> Similarly, the course of the Danelaw boundary of later ninth-century date is famously described in the text known as Alfred and Guthrum as running 'up the Thames, and then up the Lea, and along the Lea to its source, then in a straight line to Bedford, and then up the Ouse to Watling Street'.<sup>98</sup> Both these latter frontiers were drawn up on a grand scale as measures designed to define space over great distances by substantial political entities. Wansdyke fits with the general character of these frontiers and appears to reflect the mindset of the larger middle Anglo-Saxon kingdoms with regard to how they separated themselves from their neighbours. It is worthy of note here that in virtually all other contexts (for example settlements and burial location) the precise physical definition of space in social terms became significant again from the late sixth century, but more commonly during the seventh and eighth centuries.<sup>99</sup>

What was the social reality of living in a major frontier zone? Did populations either side of the Wansdyke frontier view themselves as Mercians or West Saxons, or were they articulated by supralocal communities, such as the hundred? Were individual settlements considered to be the lowest common denominator?

The nature of early medieval frontiers has been considered from a documentary perspective in a series of European studies pertinent to this discussion.<sup>100</sup> Barrow's essay on the relationship between frontier and settlement in the Anglo-Scottish border region notes how 'the Border was an artificial creation, the product of a series of compromises or bargains negotiated with little regard for either the inhabitants or even the geography of the region through which its line was patiently drawn'. The degree to which the line of the frontier fluctuated between the tenth and mid-twelfth centuries is of interest with major topographical features determining limits at any given time.<sup>101</sup>

The field archaeology of the Wansdyke frontier exhibits exactly what might be expected of such a frontier, particularly with regard to the relationship of the

<sup>97</sup> Hill and Worthington, *Offa's Dyke, History and Guide*.

<sup>98</sup> The Treaty of Alfred and Guthrum, known as AGu I, is printed in *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, ed. A. J. Robertson (Cambridge, 1922).

<sup>99</sup> Reynolds, 'Boundaries and Settlements'.

<sup>100</sup> R. Bartlett and A. Mackay, eds, *Medieval Frontier Societies* (Oxford, 1989).

<sup>101</sup> G. Barrow, 'Frontier and Settlement: Which Influenced Which? England and Scotland, 1100–1300', in *Medieval Frontier Societies*, ed. Bartlett and Mackay, pp.3–21 (p.4).

dykes to estate boundaries apparently ignored when the county boundary between Berkshire and Hampshire was created. The failure of Roman towns to regenerate along the Wansdyke frontier finds useful parallels further afield. For example, in northern Italy in the early Middle Ages, Gian Petro Brogiolo has noted that territories quickly dominated by their neighbours exhibit a high degree of central place continuity, while those in regions of longer-term dispute do not.<sup>102</sup>

One of the most intriguing questions is why the Wansdyke frontier is so obscure in documented terms. It was clearly intended as a major undertaking by a polity based to the south, yet with regard to the earthworks, it has left little trace on the documented administrative geography of the landscapes that it crosses, nor does it feature explicitly in the cosmology of the more shadowy accounts of sub-Roman Britain found in Gildas, and then re-related in Bede and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. It can be tentatively proposed that the Wansdyke frontier was the first of three successive West Saxon frontiers in central and southern England (Fig. 2.1). The second is the Thames, which became relevant, in this context, once Berkshire and North Wiltshire were safely consolidated into Wessex by the ninth century. It can be no coincidence that the Thames rather than the Danelaw frontier appears to be the concern of military planners with regard to the Burghal Hidage forts along its course. For those that see the Burghal Hidage as simply a reshuffling and augmentation of earlier arrangements, the defensive nature of the Thames frontier is perhaps best seen as that succeeding the Wansdyke line once firmer boundaries became established between Wessex and Mercia. The Danelaw boundary represents the third major frontier under consideration.

The physicality of the Wansdyke frontier can be read as an articulation of communities at the level of the embryonic state. For a short period, imbued with meaning related by name to a heroic ancestor, the boundary line must have promoted the forging of a West Saxon identity in early England.<sup>103</sup>

<sup>102</sup> G.-P. Brogiolo, 'Towns, Forts and the Countryside: Archaeological Models for Northern Italy in the Early Lombard Period', in *Towns and their Territories between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. G. P. Brogiolo, N. Christie and N. Gauthier (Leiden, 2000), pp.299–323 (p.310).

<sup>103</sup> Thanks are due to the considerable expertise of Mark Bowden and David Field who walked part of East Wansdyke with us and provided valuable insights and observations. Andrew Lawson kindly allowed us to publish the results of the 1985 cutting through East Wansdyke at Wernham Farm by the then Trust for Wessex Archaeology, while Amanda Grieve of the Ancient Monuments Laboratory provided information about the radiocarbon date. Judie English and Graham Brown are thanked for their discussion of the Wansdyke problem.



# SETTLEMENT ORGANIZATION AND FARM ABANDONMENT: THE CURIOUS LANDSCAPE OF REYKJAHVERFI, NORTH-EAST ICELAND

Birna Lárusdóttir

## *Introduction*

In Iceland, relatively little research has taken place in the field of settlement patterns and the structure of early communities. Yet, for many reasons, Iceland is an exceptionally good place to study them. The country was not settled until late in the ninth century and it is generally accepted that the locations of individual farms have not changed dramatically since then. *The Book of Settlements*, a twelfth-century source that contains information on the first settlers and their choice of land, mentions some six hundred farms of which the vast majority are still inhabited today. Other written sources, such as sagas, are helpful when it comes to observing how settlement took place. Although these written sources are limited, one must object strongly to the assertion that Iceland has no prehistory.

The Icelandic landscape has not been as dramatically affected by modern human impact as many other European countries. Still it is not until recently that archaeologists have begun to observe the archaeological landscape through field survey. Adding that to the historical information, a new perspective can be obtained on the size and shape of communities, how they were formed, and how they may have changed over time. Changes in settlement patterns in Iceland have often been explained through environmental determinism, invoking such things as climatic change, volcanic eruption and erosion. In the following piece a case study of the formation of a rural community will be introduced and an attempt made to explain the establishment and disintegration of a small community, using different types of sources.

Field survey in Reykjahverfi in north-east Iceland has recently revealed an unusual number of ancient-looking farm sites, many of which were abandoned long before the beginning of the eighteenth century and some, judging from the shape and layout of the ruins, even as early as the twelfth century.<sup>1</sup> This evidence provides a new perspective on settlement in the area and how it progressed. This essay first presents an overview of how the area may have been settled, based on written sources such as *The Book of Settlements*, sagas of Icelanders, property value figures, and the location of churches and **chapels**\*. The methods used are mostly based on the work and theories of Orri Vésteinsson.<sup>2</sup> Second comes a presentation of archaeological sites, some of which can be connected to written sources, while others were previously unknown. This is followed by a study and comparison of settlement names. Third, the location of **shielings**\* and some other results from the survey are explored to cast light on the use of outfields and how outfield management can relate to the settlement patterns. Finally, an extensive system of earthworks stretching over a large area in the north-east is discussed to help explain how settlement in the area progressed.

Reykjahverfi is a shallow valley, the easternmost of three valleys stretching south from Skjálfandi bay (Fig. 3.1). West of Reykjahverfi lies Aðaldalur, a wide, grassy and well-defined valley with high-quality land. The Laxá, a river rich in salmon, flows through it. Although Reykjahverfi is a valley in the sense that it has a river running through its middle, it is, when compared to the neighbouring valleys, more like a plain, especially at its mouth, close to the sea, where the land is flat, sloping very gradually from the bottom up to the edge of the heath. The two valleys, Aðaldalur and Reykjahverfi, are separated by Hvammsheiði, a heath that stretches from north to south. Half of Hvammsheiði belonged to Reykjahverfi, at least in later times, and was defined as common land. It is separated from the farms' outfields by a relatively small river. The farms in Reykjahverfi that are inhabited today are more or less evenly spread in a row alongside the foot of Reykjaheiði heath.

It is important to note that the archaeological remains in this area are better preserved than in most others, both because of relatively little soil accumulation and also because human impact has not been as extensive as in many other parts of the country — the making of hayfields has been more or less centralized around those farms which are still inhabited, leaving large tracts untouched by bulldozers.

<sup>1</sup> B. Lárusdóttir and E. Hreiðarsdóttir, *Fornleifaskráning í Reykjahreppi*, 2 vols (Fornleifastofnun Íslands, 2002–03).

<sup>2</sup> O. Vésteinsson, 'Patterns of Settlement in Iceland: A Study in Prehistory', *Saga-Book of the Viking Society*, 25 (1998), 1–29.

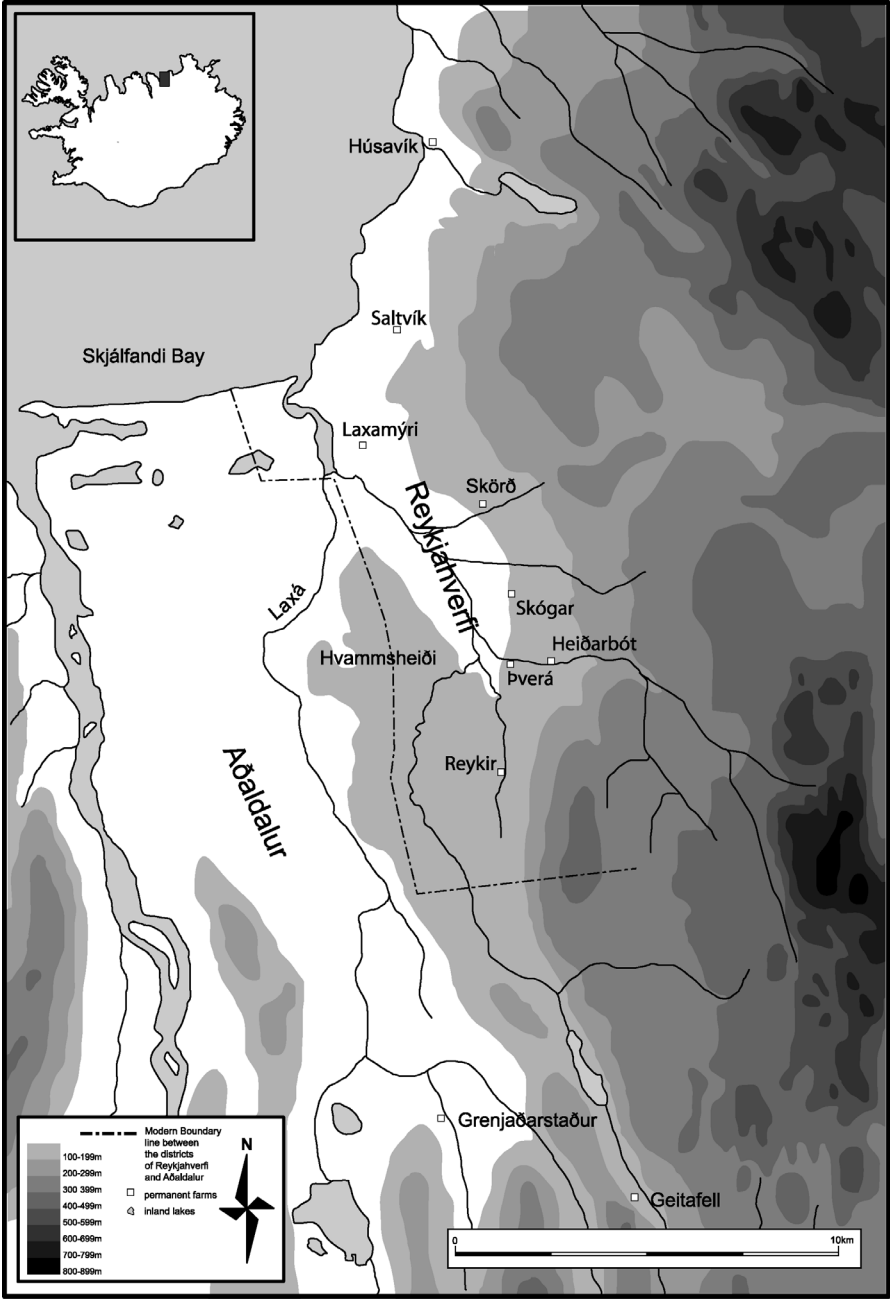


Figure 3.1. Reykjavík and surroundings.

Before delving deeper into the archaeological landscape in the area it is essential to look at the history of its settlement. This survey is based on several sources: the valuation of farms, location of churches and chapels, boundaries between farms, and written sources such as *The Book of Settlements*, sagas and charters.

### *History of Settlement*

Traditionally, the region is well known in the context of the early habitation of Iceland. According to *The Book of Settlements* a man called Garðar Svavarsson arrived in Húsavík before the actual settlement started, built a house and overwintered there.<sup>3</sup> Although *The Book of Settlements* is not to be taken literally it is now considered an important indication of how colonization could have taken place. It is easy to imagine that Húsavík played an important role in the occupation of this part of the country as it has the best landing place in the whole bay of Skjálfandi. As Orri Vésteinsson has pointed out, Húsavík is likely to have been settled early and those who lived there had every opportunity to influence the settlers that came afterwards.<sup>4</sup> It is likely that the eastern area of Skjálfandi was inhabited before Reykjahverfi, and the same applies for Aðaldalur, simply because of quality of land. The greatest part of Reykjahverfi lies higher up, has less arable land and is therefore not as ideal for an initial colonization.

The only settlement in Reykjahverfi mentioned in *The Book of Settlements* is Skörð, founded by a man called Höskuldur. His claim stretches over most of the study area.<sup>5</sup> Skörð had the highest tax value in the area, forty hundreds, along with two other farms, Laxamýri and Reykir. These farms are all very likely to have been settled early, simply because they had most of the best quality land. It can even be argued that Skörð was the least desirable farm of the three, having access neither to salmon fishing like Laxamýri, nor geothermal heat like Reykir. The River Þverá flows almost exactly midway between Skörð and Reykir and was probably the original boundary between the two settlements. There is no obvious natural boundary between Skörð and Laxamýri but a quite massive earthwork was built there, presumably during the first ages of settlement. Laxamýri was at first simply

<sup>3</sup> *Landnámabók*, ed. J. Benediktsson, Íslenzk fornrit, 1 (Reykjavík, 1968), p.35.

<sup>4</sup> E. Hreiðarsdóttir and O. Vésteinsson, *Fornleifaskráning á Húsavík* [FS166–01171] (Fornleifastofnun Íslands, 2002), pp.7–9.

<sup>5</sup> *Landnámabók*, ed. Benediktsson, p.276.

called Mýri (meaning 'wetland') but this later became Laxamýri, incorporating the river's name, to distinguish it from other Mýri farms. The name Mýri derives from the rich meadow west of the farm, close to the river Laxá, a strong reason to suspect early settlement there. Late in the nineteenth century, a hard-working farmer had an impressive irrigation system built, damming the river so its rich nutrients fertilized the meadow, increasing its productivity. Laxamýri has other outstanding natural resources, such as salmon fishing in the Laxá river, eggs in nesting colonies in the islets of Lake Mýrarvatn and seal hunting in the river's estuary. The farm Reykir is located just north of a geothermal area with a few hot springs, giving the settlement its name, Reykir meaning 'smoke' — the word settlers used to describe steam. A small, warm river with extremely grassy banks runs from the springs next to the farm's homefield, ideal for letting flow over fields and meadows. A large part of an irrigation system that was used in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is still visible south of the farm. As Orri Vésteinsson has shown in his discussion of Icelandic settlement patterns, natural meadows like these were an important factor in determining the location of initial dwellings.<sup>6</sup>

The three farms are all mentioned in early written sources. First and foremost is the *Ljósvetninga saga*, which makes Skörð the home of a great chieftain, Ófeigur Járngerðarson.<sup>7</sup> He is also introduced in the *Reykdale saga*, and furthermore a man called Þorkell is said to live in Ytri Skörð or Outer-Skörð.<sup>8</sup> Mýri and Reykir are mentioned briefly in the tale of Vöðu-Brandur.<sup>9</sup> All this points to a long-established settlement in these farms, but at least three or four other farms in the area seem to have been settled early as well: Saltvík, Skógar, Þverá and probably also Heiðarbót, although the name '-bót' could indicate a somewhat later date, deriving from the verb *beta* which means 'to add'. These are the farms with the second highest evaluations in the area, all of twenty *bundrað*\* (hdr.) except Heiðarbót, which was only ten hdr. However, these farms are not mentioned until later: Saltvík in 1296, Skógar in 1449, and Þverá in 1544.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Vésteinsson, 'Patterns of Settlement', pp.7–8.

<sup>7</sup> *Ljósvetninga saga*, ed. B. Sigfússon, Íslenzk fornrit, 10 (Reykjavík, 1940), p.3.

<sup>8</sup> *Ljósvetninga saga*, ed. Sigfússon, pp.212–13.

<sup>9</sup> *Ljósvetninga saga*, ed. Sigfússon, pp.125 and 130.

<sup>10</sup> *Diplomatarium Islandicum eða Íslenzkt fornbréfasafn 834–1600*, 16 vols (Copenhagen and Reykjavík, 1853–1976), II, 316; V, 40; XI, 344–45.

Another indicator of antiquity is the location of chapels.<sup>11</sup> In Reykjahverfi there were chapels in Saltvík, Laxamýri, Skörð and Reykir. A mound called Kirkjuhóll ('church mound') lies close to the farm Heiðarbót. According to the farmer, over recent years the farm dogs have been caught carrying human bones from here, quite a clear indication of a chapel site. The only chapel that ever came close to being a **parish**\* church was in Reykir. In charters of the church at Grenjaðarstaðir from 1318 and 1394, the possibility that Reykir church might have its own priest is mentioned, but if not the parish was to be served by an extra priest at Grenjaðarstaðir.<sup>12</sup> If Reykir ever was an independent parish it must have been subsumed by other larger parishes at an early date.<sup>13</sup> In later times the farms in the area belonged to two parishes: Grenjaðarstaðir and Húsavík. According to a farm survey of 1712 most of the inhabitants in Reykjahverfi had to travel a great distance to go to church, which was seen as very unfortunate.<sup>14</sup>

Yet more evidence for ancient settlement are pagan graves, which until recently were unknown in the area. In the summer of 2003 a small excavation was carried out close to an ancient-looking cluster of ruins in Saltvík. It revealed the remains of at least two pagan graves that had been robbed before 1477, as they were clearly sealed by volcanic **tephra**\* from that year. Two other discoveries of human remains should be mentioned. A human skeleton was found a short distance north of Reykir in the 1960s, and in the 1970s the remains of a skeleton were unearthed close to the old farm mound in Þverá — oriented north–south. This could support the idea that Þverá was settled early, that is, before the conversion in the year 1000.

The name of the area, Reykjahverfi, has a long history. It is first mentioned in the two sagas that take place in north-east Iceland: the *Ljósvetninga* and *Reykðæla sagas*. In the first, the tale of Ófeigur, a man named Þorbjörn is said to live in Reykir in Reykjahverfi, which is then obviously the name of a larger area around the Reykir farm.<sup>15</sup> The word **hverfi**\* occurs quite frequently in Icelandic place-names although it has not been studied specifically. Essentially, it means 'cluster'

<sup>11</sup> Vésteinsson, 'Patterns of Settlement'. Vésteinsson has also written about parish structures in Iceland: O. Vésteinsson, 'Íslenska sóknaskipulagið og samband heimila á miðöldum', in *Íslenska sögubíngið* 28.–31. maí 1997: *Ráðstefnurit*, 2 vols (Reykjavík, 1998), I, 147–66.

<sup>12</sup> *Diplomatarium Islandicum*, II, 433; III, 581.

<sup>13</sup> Elsewhere in this volume Orri Vésteinsson discusses how parishes represent communities in Iceland.

<sup>14</sup> *Jarðabók Árna Magnússonar og Páls Vídalíns*, 13 vols (Copenhagen, 1913–90), XI, 245–50.

<sup>15</sup> *Ljósvetninga saga*, ed. Sigfússon, p.117.

of farms, although it can also mean a valley or a natural depression of some kind — which can apply to this area. A brief survey of *-hverfi* place-names shows, however, that a vast majority of them have nothing to do with natural features but rather indicate the nature of the settlement. The term, however, is not always applied in the same way. A common usage is found in fishing areas where a cluster of households has been formed around a fishing station — for example, Járngerðarstaðahverfi in the south-west. The nearest example of a similar use of *-hverfi* in the north-east is Skriðuhverfi in Aðaldalur, where a cluster of farms has been built around Skriða, a farm that was either dominant from the beginning or later became dominant. Another example is Kelduhverfi, north-east of Reykjahverfi, which has become the name of a whole district with many farms; although this is unusual. In such cases the prefix most often includes a natural element, either a feature that dominates the area or which describes it. An example of this is Fljótshverfi (*fljót* meaning ‘river’) in the south-east, flanked by rivers that were great barriers in the past. Although this could be the case in Reykjahverfi (Reyk- or Reykja- being a very common prefix in place-names that derive from geothermal areas, even if no farm with the name is present), it seems more likely that Reykjahverfi takes its name from the farm Reykir and the surrounding farms and later expanded to the whole area. It is not very clear from the descriptions in the two sagas how far Reykjahverfi extends. In the *Reykðæla saga* a group of men on their way up north are said to have stayed overnight in Reykjahverfi with a man called Geirrekur, which seems inaccurate had the area extended as far as it does now.<sup>16</sup> Reykjahverfi seems rather to be the name of a specific location, not a valley or a whole area. In the farm register of 1712 only four farms are said to be within the hverfi: Skógar, Heiðarbót, Þverá and Reykir.<sup>17</sup>

Nowadays and at least since late in the nineteenth century, Reykjahverfi is said to reach from Skörð south to Geitafell, which is a farm 7.3 km south of the modern boundary of the district now called Reykjahreppur (Fig. 3.1). At least as early as the beginning of the eighteenth century, this southern part of the *hverfi* — more than one-third of its whole length — belonged to the parish of Grenjaðarstaðir and now belongs to the district of Aðaldælahreppur. In the beginning of the eighteenth century this area belonged to the church in Grenjaðarstaðir which used it, along with other farms, mainly for shieling purposes; so evidently there was some vested interest at stake. Geographically the boundary line drawn between

<sup>16</sup> *Ljósvefninga saga*, ed. Sigfússon, p.166.

<sup>17</sup> *Jarðabók Árna Magnússonar og Páls Vídalíns*, XI, 249.

the two districts seems highly unnatural, as it cuts across the narrow end of a valley (Fig. 3.1). This indicates that the southernmost part of the *hverfi* was lost to Grenjaðarstaðir at some point. Thus it seems that Reykjahverfi was originally only the name of Reykir and perhaps its surrounding cottages, but later stretched out to a much larger area.

### *Cottages/Ruins*

Reykjahverfi exhibits an exceptional number of assumed farm ruins that consist, in most cases, of several structures and a homefield boundary (Fig. 3.2). Most of them are not mentioned in sources until the 1712 farm survey, according to which the vast majority had been abandoned for a long time. Four were occupied until the seventeenth century: Brekknakot and Holtakot, belonging to Reykir; Skarðagerði close to Skörð; and Mariúgerði in Laxamýri which is unknown today or has become confused with other sites. Three deserted cottages around Reykir are mentioned in a 1525 register of farms belonging to the bishopric of Hólar, but apart from that there is little, if any, knowledge of when or why the cottages were abandoned.<sup>18</sup> It is not uncommon for the farm register to mention a few deserted cottages in each district, but the number in Reykjahverfi is unusually large. It is important to bear in mind that certain locations referred to as abandoned farmsteads in the register do not look convincing as such when surveyed in the field. Sometimes locations seem unfavourable and in other cases ruins are simply too small and insignificant.

When field survey was undertaken in the area in 2002 and 2003, it soon became clear that Reykjahverfi has an unusual number of ancient-looking ruins that appear to be farmsteads. Some of these are mentioned in the 1712 farm survey, but some were pointed out by local farmers and others seem to have been completely unknown. A number of sites have been damaged, for example by road construction or the levelling of homefields, and the locations of a few mentioned in earlier sources are today unknown. The first question to be answered is whether all these sites were in fact farmsteads. This is not a simple matter, and probably requires extensive excavation. However, the majority seem to fit well with the conventional definition of a farmstead — a unit that consists of several structures: a dwelling, some outhouses, and preferably a homefield boundary. With one or two exceptions all seem to fall within that description.

<sup>18</sup> *Diplomatarium Islandicum*, IX, 301.



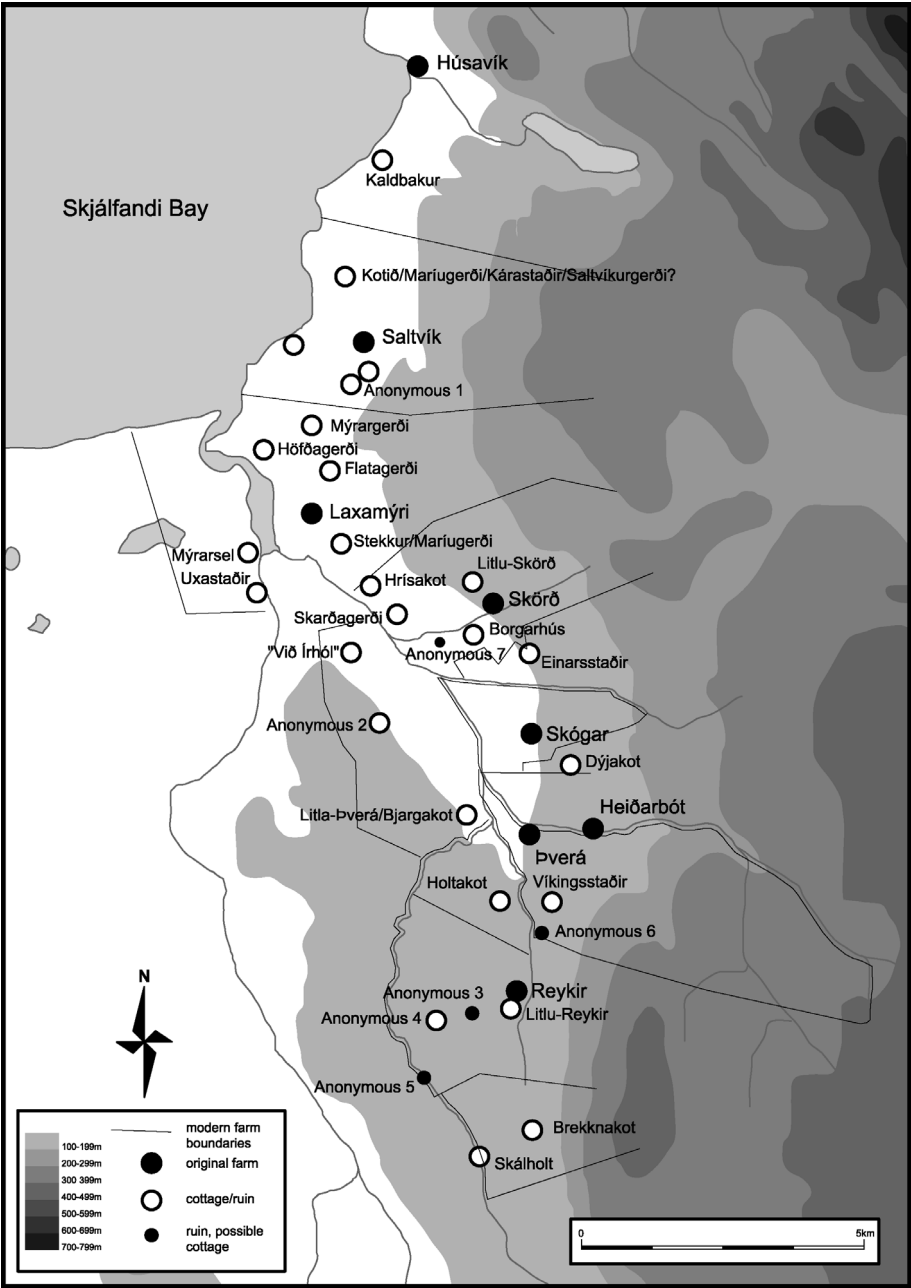


Figure 3.2. Original farms and possible cottages.

There are two main types of sites (Fig. 3.3): those enclosed by a simple boundary, and more complex ones fenced off by a double or even triple boundary. The simple ones are generally smaller although they do not necessarily have fewer structures. At this point, it is not possible to say whether this is an indication of lower status, possibly different function, or is perhaps related to different specialization in animal husbandry, chronology or length of occupation. In two cases the simple boundaries do not enclose the area around the sites, possibly because of erosion in the case of Anonymous 4. The second example is the site of Litlu-Skörð, located within a very large boundary that seems to define a territory around the farm Skörð. Although it has no boundary the Uxastaðir site is also included here as it is fenced off naturally by lava fields.

The multiple field boundaries are curious and at least four of the sites in that category share a very similar morphology: one boundary fences off the area around the dwelling and some outhouses, and an outer boundary defines a space around the first boundary and seems to have some activity linked to it. This activity is most commonly revealed by small enclosures of some kind but sometimes by structures, possibly outhouses. Where there is a third boundary it is not always very visible, but remains of such features can be seen in at least four cases and usually mark out a space with no structures within it. Two sites — the ruins in Írádalur and Skarðagerði — have an area fenced off next to the homefield without any visible structures. This is somewhat easier to explain than the multiple enclosures; it seems practical to have such an area where ewes or horses, for example, can be corralled and the enclosed land thus fertilized to extend the homefield. Similar enclosures were common in the late nineteenth century, called *nátthagi* ('night enclosures').

Multiple boundaries in Iceland have not been studied before although they have aroused curiosity in the past. At least two interesting interpretations exist in Icelandic literature. One comes from an eighteenth-century agricultural treatise composed as a dialogue or tutorial between a young man and an older farmer. This source suggests that in the beginning, when the farms were settled, people fenced off relatively small homefields but the size increased as the number of livestock grew.<sup>19</sup> According to this the multiple boundaries are a sign of how realistic the forefathers were and how they gradually enlarged their homefields as they were able to sustain larger numbers of animals. The other explanation, from the early

<sup>19</sup> B. Halldórsson, 'Atli', in *Rit Björns Halldórssonar í Sauðlauksdal* (Reykjavík, 1983), pp.49–213 (p.118).

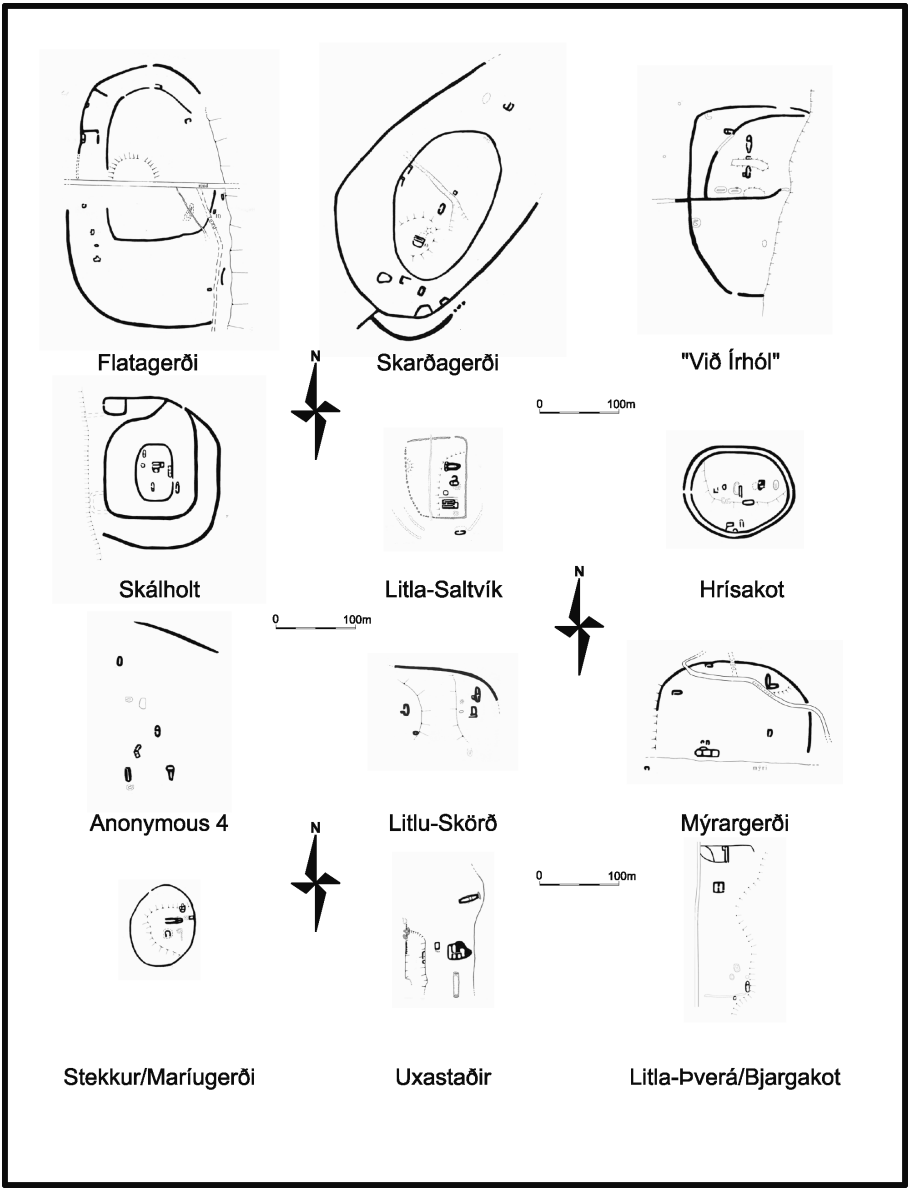


Figure 3.3. Cottage ruins — site types.

twentieth century, maintains the reverse: that the first settlers fenced off large homefields around their farms but as time went by and land degraded they were forced to reduce in size and thus build a new boundary within the limits of the old one.<sup>20</sup> The latter explanation is partly based on the fact that the numbers of cattle seem to have decreased soon after the end of the Commonwealth period, and therefore it is a reasonable assumption that less hay from the homefield was required.<sup>21</sup> This interpretation also echoes the romantic vision, inspired by sagas, which scholars and the public shared in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In this view, the Commonwealth period was seen as the golden age of Icelandic history, which went into decline after the end of the thirteenth century.

The possibility that such multiple boundaries are contemporary has not been considered, probably because it does not seem to make much sense. If a farmer wanted to enlarge his homefield it would seem more sensible to choose the best land outside it, rather than enclosing an equidistant ring all around it. In addition, building a new boundary all around the old homefield demands more work than simply enlarging it in one direction.

So far two sets of double homefield boundaries have been trenched in the district of Mývatn, south of Reykjahverfi, and in neither case can they be proven to be contemporary.<sup>22</sup> There is as yet no feasible explanation for the function of such features. In many cases, the innermost boundary stands higher than the others, simply because it has been rebuilt in connection with later phases of activity on the site, most commonly linked to the housing and winter grazing of sheep. However, there are some examples where it is possible to see the order in which the boundaries were built. In Heiðarbót there is a system of surviving earthworks just outside the modern homefield, fencing off an area of about 370 x 300 m (Fig. 3.4). The system is very similar to the double- or triple-complex homefield boundaries mentioned previously. It seems clear from the context that the innermost boundary came first; secondly a long linear boundary, possibly a pasture boundary, was added to it, stretching to the north; and thirdly a double boundary and complex enclosures were added. At this point there is of course no way of saying whether this happened over a period of ten or two hundred years.

<sup>20</sup> Þ. Thoroddsen, *Lýsing Íslands*, 4 vols (Reykjavík, 1908–22), I, 91–92.

<sup>21</sup> Thoroddsen, *Lýsing Íslands*, I, 213–34.

<sup>22</sup> M. Á. Sigurgeirsson, O. Vésteinsson, R. Edvardsson and T. Horsley, *Fornleifarannsókn á Steinboga í Mývatnssveit 2002* [FS189–02072] (Fornleifastofnun Íslands, 2003), pp.8–12; O. Vésteinsson, ed., *Landscapes of Settlement 2002* [FS218–02261] (Fornleifastofnun Íslands, 2004), pp.50–55.

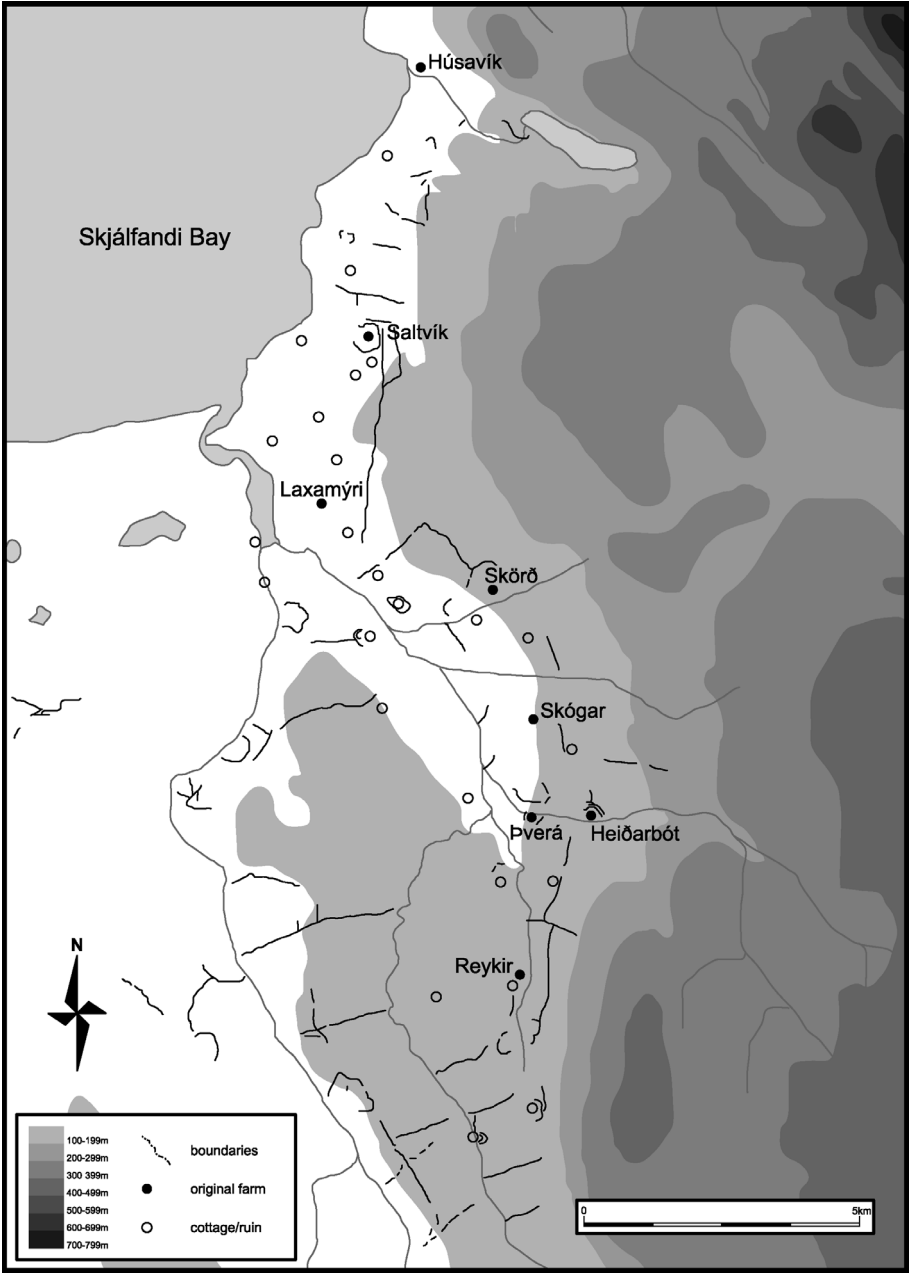


Figure 3.4. Earthworks in Reykjavherfi and Hvammsheiði.

In Skarðagerði (Fig. 3.3) it seems that the third boundary, which is now very unclear on the surface and could possibly be nothing more than a small enclosure, was added after a pasture boundary had been built up against the outer perimeter. In Íradalur it seems obvious that both the boundaries were built later than a tremendous earthwork that stretches all the way across Hvammsheiði heath.

The most bizarre case of a double boundary enclosure is, however, at Hrísakot, where both boundaries are almost exactly round and stand extremely close together leaving, except on one side, a strip of only about 5 m wide between them. Another unusual case, of a different kind, is a previously unknown site just outside the homefield of Saltvík. This is the largest ruin area of all and holds at least five or six longhouse-like structures and a number of smaller structures. This site has absolutely no boundaries at all — possibly pointing to a very short-lived settlement, or even a function that was not primarily agricultural. However, a small excavation took place there in 2003 and excluded the idea of a short-lived or failed settlement, as at least two of the structures have quite thick occupation layers and were in use after *c.*950 — demonstrated by the turf in the walls having traces of a tephra from that time.

Although there is little direct evidence for the age of the sites discussed above, some of the structures have the characteristics of longhouses — the typical Viking Age dwelling of the type that is normally dated to between the ninth and twelfth centuries. The size range of the structures is normally between 18 and 24 m in length and 6 and 8 m in width. Many of the sites have obviously been reused, and the most distinct structures probably date to the nineteenth or even early twentieth centuries. Sites such as Litla-Saltvík and Stekkur have had so many phases of reuse that it is impossible to see which structures are original, and in fact impossible to make any suggestions about the nature of the sites.

What is most striking about all these ruins is not only the excellent preservation of the landscape and the opportunity it affords to study the remains of this medieval community, but the previous density of the settlement and the large scale of abandonment. This curious pattern can be highlighted by looking at the names of surviving farms in the region and comparing them to those of neighbouring areas.

### *Farm Names in the Study Area*

In Iceland it is easy to establish that most of the earliest farms or mother settlements had simple natural feature names. Some examples have already been mentioned, such as Skörð, Mýri and Reykir. While it is difficult to prove that

secondary farms were not named in this way, it is generally accepted in Iceland — and makes perfect sense — that farms with suffixes such as *-gerði* (‘enclosed area’), *-staðir*, and *-kot* (‘cottage’) are later and generally of lower status.<sup>23</sup> There are exceptions; for example, primary farms that were abandoned for some reason often acquired the suffix *-kot*. In this way Hóll can become Hóllkot and Holt can turn into Holtakot. If we study the proportion of settlement names in the area (a total of about thirty) we find a peculiar pattern.

Table 3.1. Settlement names in Reykjahverfi.

Name type	No.	Names	Proportion
natural feature names	6	Reykir, Skógar, Þverá, Skörð, Mýri, Saltvík	20%
<b>Secondary names:</b>			
Litla-	4	Litla-Saltvík, Litlu-Reykir, Litlu-Skörð, Litla-Þverá	13%
-gerði	7	Saltvíkurgerði, Maríugerði (x2), Mýrargerði, Flatagerði, Skarðagerði, Höfðagerði	23%
-kot	5	Kotið, Hrísakot, Dýjakot, Holtakot, Brekknakot	17%
-staðir	3	Víkingsstaðir, Uxastaðir, Kárastaðir	10%
other	5	Skálholt, Heiðarbót, Stekkur, Mýrarsel, Borgarhús	17%

This is not so different from many areas in Iceland, though perhaps the proportion of secondary names is a little higher than usual. However, by 1712 — and probably much earlier — all the settlements with secondary names had been abandoned. Although some of the smaller farms, such as Einarssstaðir, Dýjakot and Holtakot were resettled in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, they had been abandoned for a long time before that according to the land register of 1712. In most cases their homefields are said to be of no use any more because they are ‘covered in heather and shrub’, or ‘sunken into wetlands’.<sup>24</sup> It is highly unusual anywhere in the country to have almost no secondary farms surviving; in many districts they account for over half of the total number of farms.

A brief look at the land register for neighbouring areas, such as Aðaldalur and Reykjadalur, reveals that many secondary farms have survived throughout the ages — a pattern common throughout Iceland. In both valleys we find quite numerous *-staðir* names such as Halldórsstaðir, Öndólfssstaðir, Einarssstaðir; and original clusters, such as in Hvammar — Presthvammur (*prest* = ‘priest’s’), Miðhvammur

<sup>23</sup> Ó. Lárusson, ‘Úr byggðarsögu Íslands’, in *Byggð og saga* (Reykjavík, 1944), pp.9–58.

<sup>24</sup> *Jarðabók Árna Magnússonar og Páls Vídalíns*, xi, 245–54.

(*mið* = ‘middle’), Ystihvammur (*ysti* = ‘outest’). There are examples of abandonment, for example in the valley of Þegjandadalur, south of Grenjaðarstaðir, where at least six farmsteads were left in this way. That area awaits further research, but it remains quite different from Reykjahverfi where the abandoned farmsteads are spread evenly among the still inhabited farms.

### *Shielings*

There are further results from the archaeological survey in Reykjahverfi — quite apart from the farm ruins — that are striking. Shielings are almost completely absent in the area. Only three of the farms had shielings that are known today: Laxamýri, Skörð and Reykir. All of them have a peculiar location. Skarðasel (*sel* = ‘shieling’) and Reykjasel are located unusually far away from the farms, high up in the mountains to the east, some 10 to 12 km away. Mýrarsel, on the other hand, was located within easy reach of Laxamýri, just across Lake Mýrarvatn. Results from archaeological survey in the north of Iceland, especially from Eyjafjörður but also from Tjörnes, show that both the location and the lack of shielings are very unusual. In a similar landscape one would expect a shieling on most of the farms. The expected location in Reykjahverfi, if we use the general results as a comparison, would be east and up from the farms, towards the heath and not a great distance away, perhaps 1 or 2 km. It has to be noted here that as early as 1318 Grenjaðarstaðir had the rights to utilize half of the shieling in Skörð.<sup>25</sup>

The explanation for this absence of shielings is, of course, not obvious. It is tempting to suggest that some of the abandoned sites served as shielings, at least at some point, but yet hard to prove. First of all, the location — with shielings spread between farms on the best agricultural land — would be highly unusual and, second, not one place-name supports this. It can possibly be argued that having shielings in the area served no purpose. Perhaps the land could carry the weight of grazing and haymaking in the summer; not forgetting the winter grazing of sheep (especially wethers) practised in Reykjahverfi, at least at the beginning of the eighteenth century. If this was the case, then there was obviously no point in taking the animals any further away.

Again, although difficult to prove, especially at this point, it is tempting to link the lack of shielings to the density of settlement. If a supposed chieftain in the area was very eager to build up his power, he is likely to have tried to get as many

<sup>25</sup> *Diplomatarium Islandicum*, II, 431.



tenants into his area of influence as possible when organizing the settlement. This could possibly, although we have no other examples of this, have involved some drastic limitations, such as using for that purpose all available land that could possibly sustain a farmstead. Thus no shielings would have been allowed within the area. This was only meant for farmsteads, with all the remaining land being used for summer haymaking and winter grazing. It is possible that some of the shielings were held in common, and used by more than one farm. The ruins of Skarðasel could support this idea, as they are more extensive than one might expect at such sites.

This suggestion of population density does not, however, explain the lack of shielings in later eras, after the settlements were abandoned. There are some indications from the survey that the management of grazing in summer was different from many other areas, as an unusual number of structures survive called *stekkur* — normally a term for a weening fold used in the spring for separating lambs and ewes. This could indicate that the ewes, or at least some of them, were kept within the range of the homeland during the summer and transferred between those folds depending on the best pasture.

### *Boundaries – A Brief Overview*

Boundaries and earthworks have already been mentioned several times in this essay, and although we have, at this point, very limited knowledge of them it is impossible to leave the archaeology of the area without considering them a little further.<sup>26</sup> These structures will presumably become a very important factor in understanding the settlement landscape in the region. In brief, there is an extensive system of earthworks that stretches over a large area in north-east Iceland — all the way from Tjörnes in the north, south to Lake Mývatn, and west to Eyjafjörður. There are two main types of earthworks in Reykjahverfi (Fig. 3.4): first, the horizontal ones that stretch from north to south above the farms' homelands; and second, transverse ones that lie east–west and thus, at least in some cases, divide up the space already marked out by the horizontal ones. If we study written sources that mention the boundaries (mostly place-name records from the nineteenth to twentieth centuries), it becomes clear that farmers in the area have interpreted the horizontal boundaries as one solid earthwork, reaching all the way

<sup>26</sup> Á. Einarsson, O. Hansson and O. Vésteinsson, 'An Extensive System of Medieval Earthworks in Northeast Iceland', *Archaeologia Islandica*, 2 (2002), 61–73.

from Mývatnssveit north to Tjörnes. The transverse dykes, especially the ones that mark property boundaries, are sometimes mentioned in written sources.

It is possible to speculate how the earthwork system was organized and which features came first simply by looking at the relationship between individual earthworks. It seems, for instance, that a boundary that marks the homeland of Skörð has been built earlier than the pasture boundary to the north of it. Today there is absolutely no sign of a smaller homefield enclosure at the farm. This boundary stretches to the south, possibly all the way to the homefield of Heiðarbót. This could indicate that the farms within it were seen as some kind of unit. The fact that this enclosure does not include the two extensive ruin areas, Hrísakot and Skarðagerði, could be an indication that they were built earlier and were clearly defined properties, marked to the north by the boundary earthwork between Laxamýri and Skörð. Perhaps this is also an indication of lower status. Furthermore, the boundary markers, both between Laxamýri/Skörð and Reykir/Þverá, seem to have been built earlier than any of the pasture boundaries linked to them. This underlines the suggestion made previously that Þverá was settled very early on, probably as early as the other three farms and, moreover, that markers between farms were seen as more important than pasture boundaries. Some other boundaries have quite obviously been built later than the horizontal earthworks and seem to have fenced off the homelands of the secondary farms: for instance the boundary between Saltvík/Laxamýri and another one, possibly between Laxamýri and Flatagerði. Around Saltvík the system gets very complex and needs to be checked in the field as up till now mapping has mostly been based upon aerial photography.

A few boundaries that seem to belong to the same system have been trenched in Tjörnes, just north-east of Reykjahverfi, and had all clearly fallen out of use long before 1477. An earthwork trenched in Fljótsheiði heath, west of Aðaldalur, was abandoned before 1158. Although the boundary system is most extensive in this part of the country, earthworks are far from unknown in other parts and some have even been dated. A few examples in the south show disuse before 1226, but other parts of the country remain largely unexplored.

### *Overview and Conclusion*

There are still many uncertainties about how settlement in Reykjahverfi took place and developed. Only limited archaeological research has been done so far, and few dates for sites and boundaries are available. Therefore it is impossible to conclude that all sites were settled and/or abandoned at the same time. The pos-

sibility cannot be excluded that some sites are not secondary but primary, original settlements that failed and were later transferred to more favourable locations. Despite this, it is clear that the settlement pattern glimpsed through the superbly preserved archaeology is both exceptional and highly intriguing. Currently some archaeological work is being carried out in the area. The most extensive project aims to map all boundaries in a large area in the north-east, including Reykjahverfi, using different scales of aerial photographs. This will, without doubt, help to throw light upon the archaeological pattern preserved. The mapping will be followed by some limited excavations, providing some dates that will be invaluable in terms of the boundary and site chronology.

At this point we can speculate a little about the organization of the settlement. It has already been suggested that a supposed chieftain, most likely in Reykir, was using a very conscious strategy to build up his power and preserve it against other chiefs in neighbouring areas, primarily Grenjaðarstaðir and Húsavík. The main arguments for this are that Reykir had very good quality land; it was the only farm that possibly had an independent parish church; and the name of the area, Reykjahverfi, is significant. It is even possible that the *-hverfi* name was carefully selected as it indicates a cluster and thus a strong unit. If, as has been suggested, Reykjahverfi did in fact reach further south than it does today, Reykir would have had a very central location in the district. It can, additionally, be pointed out that there are quite a few examples in Iceland of geothermal farms becoming centres of power. All this can be seen as an indication of a community, perhaps a rather weak one, consciously trying to define itself against other neighbouring communities that later proved to be superior.

The abandonment of farms is more difficult to comprehend at this stage. It is not impossible that the community collapsed from within because the area was too heavily populated and could not sustain such a large number of farms. However, the fact that almost without exception secondary farms were abandoned raises questions about organized desertion. This may have been planned by a powerful person within the area, but it is more likely that outsiders — perhaps in Aðaldalur — would have benefited from the change, gaining, for example, more area for upland grazing.



# GEOGRAPHY, COMMUNITIES AND SOCIO-POLITICAL ORGANIZATION IN MEDIEVAL NORTHERN ICELAND

Chris Callow

## *Introduction*

*Guðmundar saga dýra* is a narrative covering events in part of northern Iceland over the course of about fifteen years, c.1186–c.1200.<sup>1</sup> It amounts to fifty-two pages in the standard modern edition of the text which gives some impression of the level of detail. The saga is anonymous but was probably written some time in the early thirteenth century. Its author was therefore writing about a relatively recent past.<sup>2</sup> We have no way of checking the truth of its stories nor even, for the most part, of providing any sort of alternative account because none survives, if they ever existed. As a result, any attempt to reconstruct the past and analyse it based on *Guðmundar saga dýra* is highly conjectural. What follows is an attempt to read the saga with a view to presenting a picture of what communities consisted of and how they operated in the districts it covers.

Most of the saga's action takes place in the Eyjafjörður valley system, mostly in fact in the smaller valleys immediately to Eyjafjörður's east and west, and especially in Hörgárdalur (Fig. 4.1). *Guðmundar saga dýra* will not be examined in a vacuum, however. Alongside it we need to consider other sources of information on how communities might have been defined in this area and at this time: sources such as legal texts, other sagas, and later ecclesiastical documents and tax registers.

<sup>1</sup> *Sturlunga Saga*, ed. J. Jóhannesson, M. Finnbogason and K. Eldjárn, 2 vols (Reykjavík, 1946), I, 160–212.

<sup>2</sup> V. Ólason and others, eds, *Íslensk Bókmenntasaga*, 2 vols (Reykjavík, 1992–93), I, 316–18.

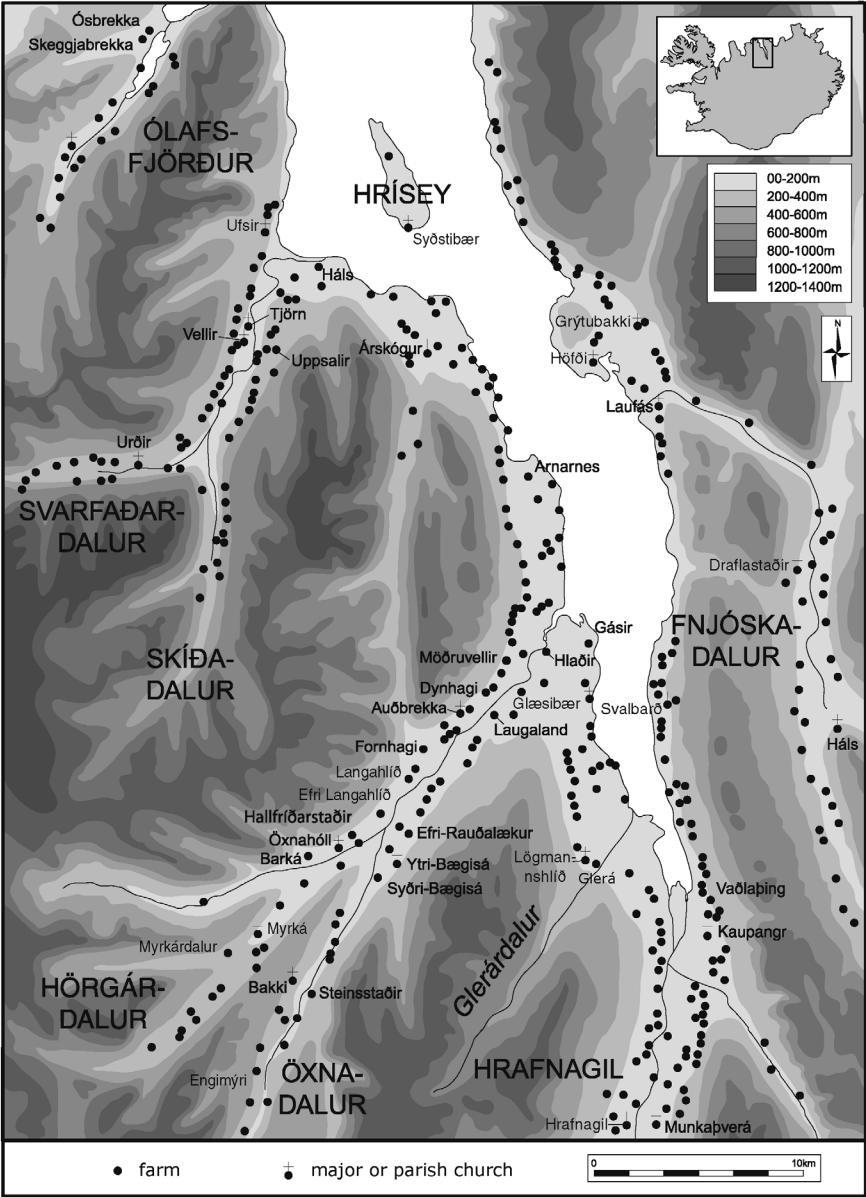


Figure 4.1. The Eyjafjörður region, where most of the action of *Guðmundar saga dýra* takes place.

The analysis that follows is designed to steer a course between two broadly separate historiographical traditions. Icelandic scholarship has dealt with the specifics of institutions and socio-political change over time, while 1980s and 1990s anthropologically influenced English-language scholarship has concentrated on examining social processes. The former has generally suffered from being obsessed with notions of 'fact' (notwithstanding literary scholars' attempts to dismiss sagas as works of literary fiction),<sup>3</sup> while the latter has all but ignored the wide range of later source material which might flesh out its view of social process. In neither case has there been a real attempt to identify how communities operated in relation to geographical space. There are good reasons for this: it is sometimes difficult to see what is going on beyond the actions described in narratives while, at the same time, it might be argued that the answers to any investigation into how communities functioned in medieval Iceland are self-evident to the scholars of that period. The reader will have to be the judge of whether this study provides real insights. What follows is an attempt to explore ways of thinking about what we mean by community in relation to medieval Iceland. The problems of using the word community have long been appreciated by historians and archaeologists; the discussion below is not couched in overt language, but I acknowledge the problems of historians' use of appropriate language to describe the behaviour of people in the past as well as the difficulties of imposing overly simplistic models of community definition.<sup>4</sup> Potentially, other approaches, such as social network analysis, might also offer ways into analysing using the same narrative sources for early Icelandic society just as they might for medieval societies in general.<sup>5</sup>

### *People*

Before trying to define what communities existed in medieval Iceland and how communities were or were not defined by the landscape, a brief assessment needs

<sup>3</sup> Ú. Bragason, 'The Word and the World: A Resonant Textual Fragment of Íslendinga Saga', paper given at Sagas and Societies, International Conference at Borgarnes, Iceland, 5–9 September 2002 <[http://w210.ub.uni-tuebingen.de/dbt/volltexte/2004/1081/pdf/28\\_ulf~1.pdf](http://w210.ub.uni-tuebingen.de/dbt/volltexte/2004/1081/pdf/28_ulf~1.pdf)>, takes a better approach to the issues of literariness, historicity and compiler's roles.

<sup>4</sup> J. Yaeger and M. A. Canuto, 'Introducing an Archaeology of Communities', in *The Archaeology of Communities: A New World Perspective*, ed. M. A. Canuto and J. Yaeger (London and New York, 2000), pp.1–15.

<sup>5</sup> I am grateful to Roger White for bringing social network theory to my attention. See, for example, J. Scott, *Social Network Analysis: A Handbook*, 2nd edn (London, 2000).

to be made of the size of the population for the period under discussion. By doing this we can begin to understand the possible nature of social, economic and political relationships between people.

For Iceland in the twelfth century, it is extremely difficult to gauge the size of the population but it has been a concern of scholars for some time, making use of later written evidence. While medieval manorial records or their equivalent are scant for Iceland, the country had a remarkably early census, taken in 1703. The 1703 census and a slightly later tax register (*Jarðabók Árna Magnússonar og Páls Vídalíns*)<sup>6</sup> provide data that can be measured against occasional references in earlier literary sources, which give an idea of what was considered a believable size for some households by certain writers at certain times and in certain places. It is likely that individual households in the Middle Ages varied a great deal in size, but perhaps six to eight people per household was typical.<sup>7</sup> It has been assumed that the number of farms in Iceland remained fairly stable from within a century or two of its colonization to the early modern period, although the evidence for this is limited. The best evidence is the continuity of place-names and the continued survival of the largest farms that appear in the medieval narratives. Yet if the 1703 census is anything to go by, in the late twelfth century the population of Hörgárdalur, the valley in which the major characters of *Guðmundr saga dýra* lived, might have been about five hundred.<sup>8</sup>

### Power

Medieval Iceland is often thought of as having a relatively flat social hierarchy, yet Icelandic society in the late twelfth century was not characterized by an equality of access to land and therefore did have a clear social hierarchy.<sup>9</sup> For the area under discussion, *Guðmundar saga dýra* makes it clear that there was a small group

<sup>6</sup> *Jarðabók Árna Magnússonar og Páls Vídalíns*, 13 vols (Copenhagen, 1913–90).

<sup>7</sup> Compare A. S. Arnórsdóttir and H. Þorláksson, 'Saga heimilis á miðöldum', in *Íslenska söguþingið 28.–31. maí 1997: Ráðstefnurit*, 2 vols (Reykjavík, 1998), I, 31–56.

<sup>8</sup> *Mannatal á Íslandi árið 1703 tekið að tilhlutan Árna Magnússonar og Páls Vídalíns* (Reykjavík, 1924–47).

<sup>9</sup> For this pattern being established during the initial colonization, see O. Vésteinsson, 'Patterns of Settlement in Iceland: A Study in Prehistory', *Saga-Book of the Viking Society*, 25 (1998), 1–29.



of *goðorðsmenn*\* ('chieftains') or *höfðingjar*\* ('leaders')<sup>10</sup> who lived there and operated across the region.<sup>11</sup> These men and their kinsmen lived on some of the largest and wealthiest farms in the region (which usually had churches and hence an income from tithes), and so they had much more of a social advantage than simply better access to law,<sup>12</sup> as some scholars have argued.

Below this top tier it is possible to see — in *Guðmundar saga dýra*, just as in other contemporary sagas — a much larger group of relatively well-off farmers who regularly feature in regional-level politics. Although it is sometimes hard to see what property these men owned, they probably owned their own farms (which generally had churches) as well as other farms which they rented out, just as chieftains seem to have done. This upper tier of society also provided bishops for Iceland's two sees — the northern diocese had its seat at Hólar in Skagafjörður — and a significant number of deacons and priests.<sup>13</sup> At the bottom of the social ladder were the mass of tenants, as well as the servants and vagrants<sup>14</sup> who rarely feature in the narratives except as foot soldiers or spies in particular conflicts. These people (usually men) are often mentioned by name — often with nicknames rather than patronymics — but are not said to have lived at any particular farm. This is probably indicative, on the one hand, of saga authors' familiarity with these people but, on the other, of their landless or itinerant status.

Any discussion of communities in medieval Iceland, then, has to appreciate that while the upper echelons of society were familiar with many of the heads of

<sup>10</sup> The word chieftain is used throughout to refer to people identified or identifiable as either *goðorðsmenn* (sing. *goðorðsmaðr*), *goðar* (sing. *goði*) or *höfðingjar* (sing. *höfðingi*). *Goðar* is the legal term for a chieftain who, among other things, acted as a legal representative for his *þingmenn* (see note 15 below).

<sup>11</sup> Jón Viðar Sigurðsson has suggested that *Guðmundar saga dýra* is really about control of just the immediate vicinity of the leading men's abodes, but the dispute is also about regional control as we shall see below. G. Karlsson, *Goðamenning: Staða og áhrif goðorðsmanna í þjóðveldi Íslandinga* (Reykjavík, 2004), p.155.

<sup>12</sup> For access to law, see W. I. Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking* (Chicago, 1990), pp.221–47 (pp.240–47).

<sup>13</sup> O. Vésteinsson, *The Christianization of Iceland: Priests, Power, and Social Change 1000–1300* (Oxford, 2000), pp.201–09.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, *Grágás. Elzta lögbók Íslendinga. Útgefin eftir skinbókinni í bókasafni konungs*, 2 vols (Copenhagen, 1852; repr., Odense, 1974), ib, 3–28. For an English translation of this text, see *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás, the Codex Regius of Grágás, with Material from Other Manuscripts*, trans. A. Dennis, P. Foote and R. Perkins, 2 vols (Winnipeg, 2000), II, 29–52. Vésteinsson, *Christianization of Iceland*, p.81.

households at other farms, as well as their own retinues containing kinsmen, *þingmenn*<sup>15</sup> and dependants of various kinds,<sup>16</sup> wealth was very unevenly distributed. Icelandic social structures were probably not so different from those of much of western Europe. The key differences are, first, that Iceland did not have the wealth to support an aristocracy that was divorced from the everyday realities of farming; chieftains were perhaps like poor relatives of the castellans of tenth-century western Europe, such as the well-known Gerald of Aurillac.<sup>17</sup> Second, the source materials are different. Saga narratives provide the detail of everyday dispute in a form which is lacking for many areas of western Europe, where disputes are recorded in shorter, more formal documents.<sup>18</sup>

### *The Course of Events*

A potted account of *Guðmundar saga dýra* should serve to show how, according to the saga's author, power worked in the late twelfth century. The basic framework of the saga is formed by the political relationships between three men and their relatives and associates. The geographical dimension of these relationships needs to be stated first. Guðmundr dýri Þorvaldsson lived at Bakki in the relatively small and sparsely populated valley of Öxnadalur.<sup>19</sup> His most obvious rival was the chieftain Önundr Þorkelsson who lived first at the mouth of the same valley system at the farm of Laugaland in Hörgárdalur before moving to Langahlíð in the same valley (ch. 9). After Önundr's death (ch. 14), his role in local politics was taken up by his son-in-law Þorgrímr alikarl who lived at Möðruvellir in Hörgárdalur when the saga began. Möðruvellir, little more than 4 km north of Laugaland as the crow flies, had been the home of another chieftain, Þorvarðr

<sup>15</sup> *Þingmenn*, sing. *þingmaðr*, were those men who were not *goðar* but who owned sufficient wealth to be obliged under Icelandic law to declare themselves as supporters of a *goðorðsmaðr*. In practice this was usually at least one person per farm. Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking*, pp.22–25, gives a succinct account of the system.

<sup>16</sup> The raising of retinues forms a key part of how communal activity can actually be identified in the Icelandic narrative sources as will be seen below.

<sup>17</sup> Odo of Cluny, *Life of Gerald of Aurillac*, in *Soldiers of Christ*, ed. by T. F. X. Noble and T. Head (London, 1995), pp.296–362.

<sup>18</sup> W. Davies and P. Fouracre, eds, *The Settlement of Disputes in Early Medieval Europe* (Cambridge, 1986).

<sup>19</sup> Fig. 4.1. For the sake of convenience in this article, Öxnadalur will be considered to be part of Hörgárdalur, from which it branched. The latter term will refer to both valleys.

Þorgeirsson. Þorvarðr's son, Ögmundur Þorvarðsson, had been in Norway for some unspecified time and when he returned (ch. 10), rather than living in Hörgárdalur, he eventually settled some distance away at Háls in Fnjóskadalur, east of Eyjafjörður. The saga is not explicit about what had happened for Ögmundur and his father to lose control of Möðruvellir to Þorvarðr.

The overall pattern of politics in the region centring on Hörgárdalur is one in which tensions continue to rise between Guðmundr dýri and his main rivals, Önundr and then his son-in-law Þorgrímr alikarl, until Guðmundr defeats them each in turn. Each of these men has *þingmenn* and other supporters across the valleys (Fig. 4.2). Guðmundr dýri is said to have dispensed with the local assembly, the Vaðlaþing (*Hann hafði af tekit Vaðlaþing. Skyldi þar eigi sóknarþing heita*)<sup>20</sup> which, if we believe the simplistic, legal texts' views of local *þing*\*, was a disruption of an ages-old folk moot. While Guðmundr dýri may not, in fact, have been the first chieftain to be in a position to suspend a local assembly, the text sees this as a significant departure for northern Icelandic politics in the later twelfth century and a measure of Guðmundr's growing power. Guðmundr dýri and Önundr and Þorgrímr alikarl grow in power, as demonstrated by the eventual disappearance of Þorvarðr Þorgeirsson from the narrative and Önundr's and Þorgrímr alikarl's takeover of farms in lower Hörgárdalur. Guðmundr dýri's considerable power can also be measured by the fact that when one of his supporters falls out with Ögmundur Þorvarðsson, the case against Guðmundr's supporter is led by Jón Loptsson, the leading chieftain from the south (ch. 10). Guðmundr's 'side' loses this case but he gets away with not paying the enormous fine awarded against him.

From across the region to the north of Hörgárdalur — Fljót, Ólafsfjörður and Svarfaðardalur — people still seek out either Guðmundr or Önundr as their advocate (chs 11–14). Guðmundr dýri still also has the support of neighbouring chieftains against Önundr and, together with Kolbeinn Tumason, Guðmundr carries out the so-called *Önundarbrenna*, the arson attack on Önundr's home at Langahlið which kills Önundr and many others (ch. 14). Guðmundr now buys off Ögmundur Þorvarðsson by belatedly paying off the 1200 *bundruð*\* fine which he owed from their previous dispute, and thereby ending any chance of Ögmundur acting against him.

For a brief while peace seems to have broken out, but Þorgrímr alikarl and Önundr's sons then make an attempt to remove Guðmundr from the political scene. As they gather troops for a raid on Guðmundr at Bakki, they kill a

<sup>20</sup> *Sturlunga Saga*, ed. Jóhannesson, Finnbogason and Eldjárn, I, 170; J. V. Sigurðsson, *Frá Goðorðum til ríkja* (Reykjavík, 1989), p.58.

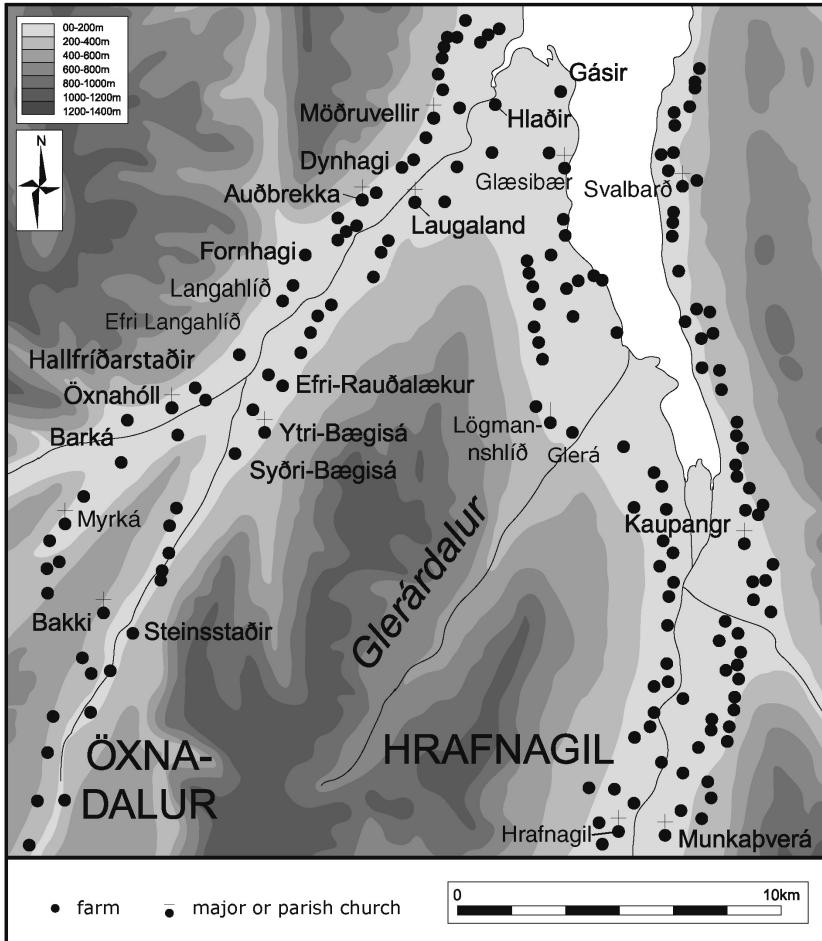


Figure 4.2. Map to show Hörgárdalur and surrounding valleys.

supporter of Guðmundr's who lived at Arnarnes on the west coast of Eyjafjörður (chs 17–18). They raid Bakki, but Guðmundr is not present and instead they only remove his men's 'weapons and shields'. At this point the bishop of Hólar visits Hörgárdalur to encourage each side to back down. Þorgrímr alikarl goes away to the south of Iceland to gather support from his kinsmen there which allows Guðmundr (with Kolbeinn Tumason again) to raid Laugaland and other farms in lower Hörgárdalur.

A further attempt by neutrals to negotiate a long-term peace ends in failure, and Þorgrímr alikarl leads a raid on Bakki with a force of one hundred men (ch.

23). This raid ultimately fails, however, and leads to Þorgrímr's force being surrounded at a neighbouring farm by men led by Guðmundr, Kolbeinn Tumason (who is said to have brought six hundred men) and Ögmundur Þorvarðsson. Þorgrímr leaves Hörgárdalur and is said to have moved to the farm of Geldingaholt in Skagafjörður. The saga ends with three episodes not related to the longer-term conflict mentioned above or to each other. The latter two are worth mentioning here. The farm of Vellir in Svarfaðardalur is a source of dispute for Guðmundr's supporters the Arnþrúðarsons, whose father had occupied the farm (ch. 25). As it is a church farm (*staðr*), however, the bishop of Hólar tries to appoint his own tenant rather than one of the Arnþrúðarsons. In the end a compromise is reached whereby the farm will be run by the bishop's tenant but revert to the Arnþrúðarsons after his death; Guðmundr is noticeably cautious in his opposition to the bishop. The saga ends with a story about Guðmundr which the saga author seems to have not known quite where to place chronologically and so saved for the end. This is an account of a dispute in which a Norwegian trader cuts off the hand of a deacon. Eventually, after the Norwegian refuses to pay compensation, Guðmundr dýri intervenes and offers him the chance to choose between paying or losing his own hand. The compensation is paid quickly. The penultimate sentence of the saga says that Guðmundr became a monk at Þingeyrar in Húnavatnssýsla, west of Skagafjörður.

To recap, then, the saga sees the three groups (Guðmundr dýri; Önundr and Þorgrímr alikarl; Þorvarðr Þorgeirsson and Ögmundur Þorvarðsson) working as advocates in disputes between less powerful men. The disputes which the saga describes are otherwise quite varied in their causes, their personnel, the point at which the chieftains get involved and the precise nature of their resolution. Geographically they are also quite well dispersed over the region centring on Hörgárdalur although there are patterns, to which I shall return. Almost any episode might therefore serve as examples; two are chosen here. Neither is truly typical but they are representative in many respects and have the advantage of being relatively self-contained and involving relatively few actors.

The saga begins with a dispute over a farm in Reykjadalur, east of Eyjafjörður, called Helgastaðir (chs 1–3). The dispute begins after its owner, Guðmundr, becomes a monk, leaving the property to his son. The son dies before him, however, and so nobody is now quite sure who the heir is. A wealthy neighbour, Eyjólf Hallsson, decides to buy the property from the former owner-now-monk at a knock-down price. Opposing the neighbour, however, are the brothers of the now monk; that is, the uncles of the deceased owner. In the end the uncles each turn to their respective chieftains, Önundr Þorkelsson and Þorvarðr Þorgeirsson, who

only agree to prosecute the case on the grounds that they themselves are given ownership of the farm. Eyjólfur, the neighbour who thinks he has already bought Helgastaðir, gets support from people from Skagafjörður, far to the west, and from someone from Eyjafjörður who may also have been a chieftain. Eyjólfur's advocates succeed in court in getting Önundur and Þorvarður made outlaws for supposedly having stolen Helgastaðir.

Rather than being in fear of their legal status as outlaws, Önundur and Þorvarður arm themselves and take fifty men to occupy Helgastaðir. There is a physical stand-off between Önundur and Þorvarður's force and that of Eyjólfur and his supporters. Guðmundr dýri and another *goðorðsmaðr* from Skagafjörður intervene at this point, arriving with their own force to prevent any fighting. In the end an agreement is reached involving Guðmundr dýri and his associate taking on the role of mediators. It is agreed that Helgastaðir is to be given to the son of Eyjólfur's advocate from Eyjafjörður, one Klængur, rather than directly to either of the original claimants. Rather than this being a compromise, however, it transpires that Klængur later sold the property to Eyjólfur. Thus Guðmundr dýri was partly responsible for preventing his powerful neighbouring rivals from acquiring a valuable property.

The second example of a dispute is one which takes up a single chapter, chapter 8. It describes a dispute between a man from Garðshorn in Svarfaðardalur,<sup>21</sup> Brandr, and a man called Sumarliði from the farm of Tjörn, a few kilometres north of Garðshorn. The dispute began when Brandr went to church and his horse got loose and ate the hay in the homefield of Tjörn without Sumarliði's permission. Sumarliði expressed his disgust by hitting Brandr and his horse with a cudgel (*með lurk*) at the scene. At another feast day, but seemingly a considerably larger social event, at the *kirkjudagr*<sup>22</sup> of Öxnahóll church in Hörgárdalur, Brandr attacked and killed Sumarliði. Brandr's escape (to Norway) was aided by two men from Skagafjörður, namely the chieftain Kolbeinn Tumason and Björn Ólafsson from Fell. Brandr and his associates were prosecuted for the killing by Guðmundr dýri who, in a show of regional solidarity, was supported by Önundur. A further minor adjustment was made to the local political scene with the expulsion of one of Brandr's accomplices from the north.

<sup>21</sup> Fig. 4.1. *Sturlunga Saga*, ed. Jóhannesson, Finnbogason and Eldjárn, I, 174; Vésteinsson, this volume.

<sup>22</sup> A *kirkjudagr* was an annual celebration of a church's consecration. Six such events are mentioned in the *Sturlunga Saga* compilation: *Sturlunga Saga*, ed. Jóhannesson, Finnbogason and Eldjárn, II, 481.

These two disputes demonstrate some of the themes which will appear below. They show, for example, how a dispute in one valley could soon escalate to involve powerful advocates from other areas, whether or not a chieftain lived in the valley where the original disputants lived. The wide variety of contacts which an individual might have in this society, regardless of their wealth or social standing, also comes out. The geographical range of communication is also quite considerable. Finally, the two disputes here also demonstrate that, depending on the nature of the dispute, the same *goðorðsmenn* could work for or against one another. Allegiances and affinities could change according to particular circumstances.

### *Social Events*

It is worth asking when people who lived relatively close to each other actually met up in late twelfth-century Iceland. For Iceland, relatively dispersed settlement pattern would have meant that spontaneous socializing would have had to have been relatively well planned (unless it involved just people on the same farm and its associated outliers),<sup>23</sup> and was much more likely to have taken place in summer. At the same time, interaction between neighbouring farms was probably not uncommon especially if they were near and people owned horses, as frequently seems to have been the case. It was while making a superficially ordinary visit to Arnarnes, for example, that Hákon Þórðarson from Laufás is said to have killed his lover's husband (ch. 5). In this case Hákon is supposed to have visited Arnarnes — about 7 km across the fjord from Laufás but still arguably a neighbouring farm — throughout the winter. Laufás and Arnarnes were relatively large farms and one might suspect that the senior men of the household had more free time to pursue their love interests than many other people, but visits between farms were probably quite regular. Þorvaldr from Ytri-Bægisá and a húskarl made shorter journeys for love across Hörgárdalur, to visit a mother and daughter both called Birna who lived at Efri-Langahlíð (ch. 12). Similarly, people were likely to meet when out shepherding or when working close to farm boundaries. The annual hiring or 'moving days' (*fardagar*) in May also circulated people and information.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Vésteinsson, this volume.

<sup>24</sup> *Grágás*, IA, 128–31.

More regular events and patterns of behaviour existed, however. Going to church<sup>25</sup> and taking part in wedding celebrations are two examples which are much more likely to have seen large groups of people get together during the year.<sup>26</sup> Some sort of communal sheep round-up in autumn was also likely to have been important.<sup>27</sup> As sagas are essentially records of things which happen once or are 'eventful', then we ought to expect them to record quite a lot of these kinds of events. Indeed, in the contemporary sagas such events do get recorded and they do show large numbers of people socializing, at least at the upper end of the social ladder. Weddings are mentioned in *Guðmundar saga dýra* (e.g. ch. 5) but it is difficult to assess how many people attend and where the guests are from, just as is the case in other Contemporary Sagas.<sup>28</sup> Sagas of Icelanders are less reticent about numbers but they clearly generalize and exaggerate. Nevertheless, relatively short life expectancy, probably even by medieval western European standards, and a cultural preference for girls to marry early may have led to a comparatively high number of weddings in medieval Iceland.

Church attendance might not have been particularly regular in twelfth-century Iceland but it is clear that many churches which can be documented in the later Middle Ages existed by this stage. It can be inferred that others existed too.<sup>29</sup> Two things need to be said about churchgoing: first, that it happened in *Guðmundar saga dýra*, and a system of **parishes**\* is likely to have existed and to have shaped community identity; second, that there were religious festivals that had a wider importance and involved the attendance of a wider community.

Although our understanding of the evolution of parishes is hampered by a lack of early documentary evidence for northern Iceland, it would seem likely that parishes were in existence well before they were first systematically recorded for

<sup>25</sup> O. Vésteinsson, 'Íslenska sóknaskipulagið og samband heimila á miðöldum', in *Íslenska sögubpingið* 28.–31. maí 1997, I, 147–66 (p.161).

<sup>26</sup> For a description and analysis of a similar situation, see W. Davies, *Small Worlds: The Village Community in Early Medieval Brittany* (London, 1988), especially chapter 5.

<sup>27</sup> See *Grágás*, I, 113–21, for the regulation of pasture.

<sup>28</sup> Contemporary Sagas (*samtíðarsögur*) is the collective name for texts written in the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries which describe events in Iceland in the relatively recent past. This genre can be sub-divided into two groups: the compilation of texts known as *Sturlunga saga*, named after the family with which they are associated, and sagas about individual bishops (*biskupasögur*).

<sup>29</sup> Vésteinsson, *Christianization of Iceland*, esp. pp.37–45, 94–101 and Tables 1 and 5.



the diocese of Hólar in 1318.<sup>30</sup> It is also true that it is not always possible to identify all of the farms which made up the early parishes because in the earliest charters identifying church property (*máldagar*, sing. *máldagi*) individual farms are not named. Not all churches have equally old charters either and so comparisons can be difficult. This is especially relevant to Hörgárdalur where *máldagar* only exist for Bakki, Bægisá, Laugaland and Auðbrekka from a document dated to 1394.<sup>31</sup> Möðruvellir became a monastery from 1296 and, as this church is omitted from the 1318 compilation, no *máldagi* survives for it at all as a simple church. Nevertheless the size of parishes or at least the number of farms from which they took dues is instructive for gauging something of the nature of the church's administration and, by proxy, some sort of social organization.

For Hörgárdalur, the *máldagar* are not particularly forthcoming but in 1394 Bakki received lighting and hay dues from ten farms. Auðbrekka, the only other church in the valley for which there is a clear statement on the matter, received hay dues from eight farms but, unusually, received lighting dues from a smaller number, only two. For Eyjafjörður and its tributary valleys it would seem that it was usual in 1318 for most churches to receive dues from between six and twelve farms. Given the number of farms recorded in later centuries and the evidence we have for churches in *Guðmundar saga dýra*, it would seem possible that the pattern was the same in the late twelfth century. Indeed, the saga's evidence would suggest so as attendance at the parish church provided the opportunity for disputes between people who lived close to one another, such as when Brandr and Sumarliði clashed outside the church at Tjörn (ch. 8). Unusual events, such as the *kirkjudagr* at Öxnahóll (ch. 8), brought in people from further around, but on this particular occasion, the only evidence we have is that those from outside the parish were mostly well-off; Brandr, the son of a farmer on a relatively modest farm (Tjarnargarðshorn), may only have been present because he knew that the better-off Sumarliði would be there.

Other events and places also warrant brief discussion. Horse fights and games do take place in this saga just as they do for Sagas of Icelanders. A horse fight in the Fljót district is the scene for an attack on Nikulás Skrattra-Bjarnarson, a *þingmaðr* of Guðmundr dýri who lived at Grindill in the same district (ch. 12). Shortly afterwards, at Syðri-Bægisá, a farm close to the confluence of Hörgárdalur and Öxnadalur, there were games (ch. 12). The events recorded for this show a

<sup>30</sup> *Diplomatarium Islandicum eða Íslenzkt fornbréfasafn 834–1600*, 16 vols (Copenhagen and Reykjavík, 1853–1976), II.

<sup>31</sup> *Diplomatarium Islandicum*, III.

‘coming together’ of people from across the valley and beyond as tensions rise between a supporter of Kolbeinn Tumason’s (a kinsman of the Nikúlas who had just been attacked) and men from Langahlíð, now the home of the chieftain Önundr. Taken at face value, the saga seems to imply that contentious social events were organized one close after the other. It is more likely, however, that although such occasions were held regularly they were less memorable because they passed off peaceably, or else any conflicts did not involve local leaders so directly. Another measure of their regularity and importance is also suggested when the saga shows the abnormality of Guðmundr and ‘his men’ not going to meetings and games for several months as local political tensions rose.<sup>32</sup>

Markets and assemblies figure fully as well, and it is clear that these sorts of business-orientated gatherings of more people were important. Gásir, the port on the west coast of Eyjafjörður close to the mouth of Hörgárdalur, formed the backdrop to a handful of events in *Guðmundar saga dýra* and other narratives. Courtship, or an arranged marriage, between Guðmundr dýri’s daughter Ingibjörg and Þorfinnr Önundarson takes place at Gásir (ch. 9). It is possible that Gásir provided some sort of neutral venue for local chieftains to meet.

### *Secular Institutions*

The historiography and realities of early Icelandic society demand that attention be paid to *goðorðsmaðr-þingmaðr* relationships and communes, two forms of social relationship which were unavoidable according to the legal texts.

Men owning a certain amount of property were obliged to ally themselves publicly to one or other of the men who inherited a *goðorð* (chieftaincy), who, as we have already seen, were known as *goðorðsmenn* or *goðar*. In practice it would seem from all forms of evidence that most men who were heads of household, as well as others, were likely to have owned the wealth which made them eligible as *þingmenn*. Whether, in actuality, everyone was aware at all times of such relationships is another matter. Certainly, it was only the wealthier farmers who seem to have made use of their *goðorðsmenn* when they needed them to act as advocate or protector. Where those men identified as *þingmenn* in the saga can be associated with a farm, the farm is one of middling to high value in *Jarðabók Árna Magnússonar og Páls Vídalíns* or other early modern tax registers.

<sup>32</sup> *Sturlunga Saga*, ed. Jóhannesson, Finnbogason and Eldjárn, I, 185: ‘Þá fór Guðmundr aldri til mannamóta um sumarit ok engir hans menn ok eigi til leika um vetrinn.’

Other people could actively ally themselves to a chieftain but, rather than being given the title *þingmaðr* in *Guðmundar saga dýra*, are identified as *fylgðarmaðr*, ‘follower’ or ‘supporter’. It appears that for the author of *Guðmundar saga dýra*, *þingmaðr* and *fylgðarmaðr* were not synonymous. In the three places where *fylgðarmaðr* is used, all qualify the term with another: Björn Gestsson from Sandr was a *fylgðarmaðr* and *þingmaðr* of Önundr’s (ch. 4) while Björn Hallsson, his father and brothers and, in the same chapter, Þórðr Þórarinnsson, were all *fylgðarmenn ok vinir* (‘supporter and friend’) of Þorvarðr Þorgeirsson’s (ch. 10). In other words, there would seem to be two different kinds of relationship which the author could identify as connecting weaker men with a chieftain.

Of equal significance to the fact that some men are identified as *þingmenn* and *fylgðarmenn* is the fact that none of these men lived close to chieftains, that is, in the valleys in which the chieftains lived. We do not know explicitly about the legal allegiances of farmers closer to chieftains’ main residences because, perhaps, there was less freedom for farmers to choose.<sup>33</sup> *Guðmundar saga dýra*’s lack of interest in the relationships of farmers to *goðorðsmenn* in Hörgárdalur would strongly suggest that the author assumed that his audience would know what they were. This might suggest that the author assumed too much with respect to his audience’s local knowledge or that, just as likely, it was unquestionable that entire valleys would be very firmly controlled by one chieftain. The exact way in which the valley may have been controlled will be discussed below.

The lack of ability to choose a *goðorðsmaðr* may also have been a force for group cohesion. In one instance in the saga it would appear that it actually united local populations against chieftains when they overstepped the mark, as seems to have happened when *Hörgdalir*, people from Hörgárdalur, complained to the bishop of Hólar about Guðmundr dýri (ch. 15).

Communal organization may well have been well defined at a local level even if our literary evidence does not take much interest in it. *Hreppar*\* (sing. *hreppur*) or communes are identified in *Grágás*, the body of legal material which has been referred to at varying points throughout this essay. According to *Grágás*, *hreppar* were associations of no fewer than twenty farmers who each were liable for *þingfarakaup*, the assembly attendance contribution payable to a *goðorðsmaðr*.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup> C. P. Callow, ‘Landscape, Tradition and Power in a Region of Medieval Iceland: Dalir c.900–c.1262’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Birmingham, 2001), pp.187–96.

<sup>34</sup> *Kulturbistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder*, 22 vols (Reykjavík, 1956–78), VII, 18–20; W. Gerhold, *Armut und Armenfürsorge im mittelalterlichen Island*, Skandinavistische Arbeiten, 18 (Heidelberg, 2002), pp.136–73.

The farms of these men had to be in a contiguous block,<sup>35</sup> making them territorial units like parishes. The main purpose of the commune was supposedly to ensure the distribution of the tithe to the poorest members of society, and the control of the movements of the landless between different localities in order to not overburden the commune members who had an obligation to support them. Thrice-yearly meetings were to ensure that these functions were carried out. The main problem with the idea of communes, however, is that they occur rarely in the normative saga material. Only a handful of references to the term exist in surviving saga literature, one of which is from chapter 25 of *Guðmundar saga dýra*, and a couple of others are found in Sagas of Icelanders which cover the same region.<sup>36</sup>

The example from *Guðmundar saga dýra* is typical of other references to events in the text or any other saga, in that it is there because it is the scene of an attack by one man on another. The so-called *hreppstefna* ('*hreppur* meeting') takes place at the farm of Háls in Svarfaðardalur, a relatively valuable farm (sixty *hundrað* in the early eighteenth century)<sup>37</sup> at the mouth of Svarfaðardalur, which was centrally placed within the *hreppur* of Svarfaðardalur that can be identified in early modern sources. Háls is slightly unusual for a farm of its size, however, in apparently not having had a church which survived into the early modern period. In a document dated to 1461<sup>38</sup> it is said to have had a **chapel**\* which had fallen into disrepair, and it appears in a list of the possessions of the monastery of Möðruvellir in 1447.<sup>39</sup> The fairly central geographical location of Háls within this *hreppur*, though, makes sense of its function as a central point or meeting place, despite the farm's situation away from the populated inland parts of Svarfaðardalur itself. It would be most reasonable for meetings to have taken place at Háls when people were travelling in and out of the valley to the coast. Given that the three annual meetings of *hreppar* are likely to have preceded or followed meetings of assemblies of regional and national significance in spring, summer and autumn (respectively *várþing*, **Alþing**\* and *leið*), Háls would have made a sensible stopping-off point for the *hreppur*'s population, regardless of its status otherwise.

<sup>35</sup> *Grágás*, 1b, 171.

<sup>36</sup> *Víga-Glums saga*, ch. 13, in *Eyfirðinga sögur*, ed. J. Kristjánsson, Íslenzk fornrit, 9 (Reykjavík, 1956), p.43. *Reykðæla saga*, ch. 7, in *Ljósvefninga saga*, ed. B. Sigfússon, Íslenzk fornrit, 10 (Reykjavík, 1940), p.169.

<sup>37</sup> *Jarðabók Árna Magnússonar og Páls Vídalins*, x, 93–94.

<sup>38</sup> *Diplomatarium Islandicum*, v, 356.

<sup>39</sup> *Diplomatarium Islandicum*, iv, 712.

### *Local Communities*

The word community has been used sparingly in the discussion above. Some mention has been made of space or distance, and of a variety of ways in which people interacted with those living at other farms and the reasons behind those interactions. This final section, however, is designed to flesh out the picture of communities' form by analysing *Guðmundar saga dýra*'s depiction of socio-political interactions at the level of the individual valley. 'The valley' is about as good an analytical unit for Iceland as there is, although there are obvious problems with it. It must be accepted — and the earlier discussion should have made this clear — that the often difficult terrain in Iceland did not prevent fairly frequent communication between areas tens or hundreds of kilometres apart. Individual valleys were rarely isolated, at least not in northern central Iceland.

Hörgárdalur provides the best case study for seeing society function in *Guðmundar saga dýra* because this valley system was a home to chieftains. Although, inevitably, the text does not cover everyday events, the unusual happenings it purports to record do give a sense of how local society operated. Several farms in this area are mentioned (beginning in the northernmost, outer part of the valley and going south and up): Hlaðir, Möðruvellir, Dynhagi, Laugaland, Auðbrekka, Langahlíð,<sup>40</sup> Efri-Langahlíð,<sup>41</sup> Grund,<sup>42</sup> (Efri-?)Rauðalækur, Hallfríðarstaðir, Öxnahóll, Ytri-Bægisá, Syðri-Bægisá, Myrkárdalur, Steinsstaðir and Bakki (Fig. 4.1). This list nevertheless demonstrates that we have only a very partial view of the population that lived in this area. Almost all of these farms were large in the early modern period; and if the tax registers are anything to go by, we ought to expect there to have been over sixty households or dwellings in the valleys inland from Hlaðir.<sup>43</sup>

First something needs to be said about the possible nature of medieval *breppar* in this small valley system. Two *breppar* existed here in the early modern period, Skriðubingsókn and Glæsibæjarhreppur. The first covered most of the farms listed above, all bar Laugaland, Rauðalækur and Ytri-Bægisá, and included all of Hörgárdalur and Öxnadalur except for the former's eastern side from Ytri-Bægisá northwards. Glæsibæjarhreppur formed a kind of U-shape on the map, beginning in

<sup>40</sup> Modern Skriða, *Sturlunga Saga*, ed. Jóhannesson, Finnbogason and Eldjárn, I, 552.

<sup>41</sup> Modern Langahlíð, *Sturlunga Saga*, ed. Jóhannesson, Finnbogason and Eldjárn, I, 552.

<sup>42</sup> Grund is not identified in Fig. 4.1 because it is not identifiable as a modern farm in Hörgárdalur but probably close to modern Skriða, *Sturlunga Saga*, ed. Jóhannesson, Finnbogason and Eldjárn, I, 553.

<sup>43</sup> Vésteinsson, this volume.

lower Hörgárdalur and extending round as far as Glerá (including that particular farm, which was named after the river next to it (Fig. 4.1)). In practice, therefore, *Guðmundar saga dýra*'s account of local politics might be seen as only dealing in detail with one *hreppur*. The number of farms from Glæsibæjarhreppur which feature is no more than for many, far more distant *hreppar*, although it is also true to say that the little we know of Skriðupingsókn derives from a handful of episodes in the saga.

The names of the two *hreppar* also deserve brief discussion. They are named after farms: Skriða was the name of Langahlíð from the later Middle Ages, after a substantial collapse of the slope had destroyed the original farm; Glæsibær was a church farm of at least the same size as many of the larger farms in Hörgárdalur. Although it can be argued that the early modern names may only indicate the significance of the eponymous farms in a later period, the medieval evidence could imply some sort of earlier primacy for these farms. Langahlíð was a farm which Önundr sought to move to in preference to Laugaland. The absence of Glæsibær from the saga is interesting, and it is best explained, if not wholly satisfactorily, as reflecting the power of Önundr at Laugaland and the text's disinterest in Glæsibæjarhreppur generally.

Regardless of the paucity of our information, and perhaps because of it, we can see something which resembles a very local level socio-political community in action in *Guðmundar saga dýra*'s Hörgárdalur. We can see its complexities and the importance of certain wealthy individuals, the chieftains, in influencing others' lives. The first time the saga mentions anyone from Hörgárdalur other than a local leader, it identifies two priests who are asked to arbitrate in a dispute between supporters (from outside Hörgárdalur) of Önundr and Guðmundr (ch. 4). The priests are from the farms of Möðruvellir and Öxnahóll respectively. As in many disputes in saga literature, it seems likely that these men were chosen as arbitrators because they were each regarded as loosely allied to one of the disputants but could be relied upon to be more moderate than the disputants themselves. As a priest at Möðruvellir, Hallr Gunnarsson was in the household of Þorvarðr Þorgeirsson who had worked with his fellow chieftain, Önundr. Björn Steinmóðarson, on the other hand, had married Guðmundr dýri's daughter but lived at Öxnahóll. The human geography here is as important as the personal ties because each arbitrator lived at a large farm in the same *hreppur* as one of the disputants, but each lived closer to the chieftain with whom they had other connections than to the other one.

As a general rule it would seem that Skriðupingsókn, if it had the same form in the medieval period, was divided on roughly geographical lines. This does not

mean to say that everyone in a single household or all farms in a 'sub-community'<sup>44</sup> shared strong allegiances to a single chieftain at all times. Nevertheless, Guðmundr dýri had more support and more land in the upper parts of the valley(s), and Önundr and Þorgrímr alikarl had more support in the lower valley. Þorvarðr and his son Ögmundr are noticeably absent from Hörgárdalur politics in the latter half of the saga and their interests were much more obviously focussed on Fnjóskadalur. Thus Guðmundr was able to house a concubine whom he had brought in from Svarfaðardalur at Myrkárdalur, just over the ridge from Bakki (ch. 9). He also owned Bakki's neighbouring farm, Steinsstaðir (ch. 6). Efri-Langahlíð, too, is a property which Guðmundr indirectly has an influence over, after his daughter divorced the aforementioned Björn Steinmóðarson and she was given the farm as part of the divorce settlement (ch. 12).

Önundr and Þorgrímr alikarl and their supporters are also fairly easy to identify. Nearer the coast, they control Laugaland, Langahlíð and Möðruvellir, and have supporters at Hlaðir, Rauðalækur and Dynhagi. Björn Steinmóðarson still lived at Öxnahóll and his allegiance is definitely with Önundr after his divorce (ch. 13), something for which he suffers public humiliation at Guðmundr's hands and which suggests the strength of his falling-out with Guðmundr (ch. 19). Björn's farm was halfway up the valley, close to where Öxnadalur and Hörgárdalur fork, and must have served as an important meeting point and lookout post at various times. Björn's allegiance was of vital importance to the chieftains, especially as he probably had enough wealth and a large enough household to resist the more extreme forms of bullying which other farmers received.

The allegiance of Þórir Bárðarson, the farmer from Langahlíð,<sup>45</sup> whom Önundr forcibly ejects and who moves to Laugaland (ch. 9), is not clear-cut. Although it rather contradicts the idea that Langahlíð was an early centre of power, the text does at least point out that there was a considerable difference in Önundr's and Þórir's standing (*rikismunr*).

The chequered history of a man called Illugi helps confirm the general pattern. Illugi gained the support of two chieftains but ultimately settled at Hlaðir, next to Möðruvellir, where Þorgrímr alikarl lived (ch. 9). When Illugi is first mentioned, he is said to have killed someone, but he stays with Guðmundr dýri at Bakki and is aided by Guðmundr's allies and kinsmen in Svarfaðardalur. After a

<sup>44</sup> Of the kind where a number of dwellings were clustered together, such as at Garðshorn or Langahlíð but often assumed to be a single 'farm'. Vésteinsson, this volume.

<sup>45</sup> *Sturlunga Saga*, ed. Jóhannesson, Finnbogason and Eldjárn, I, 176.

year away from Iceland, no doubt enforced by Guðmundr, Illugi comes back to spend a season at Möðruvellir, now run by Þorgrímr alikarl, before eventually marrying and settling at Hlaðir. Illugi may have consciously changed allegiances with the result that he was himself murdered by someone trying to gain support from Guðmundr (ch. 16).

Other individuals or farms seem to have been able to stay relatively neutral or else win the respect of the opposed chieftains; here there are signs of an identifiable community. When Guðmundr comes to kill Önundr (ch. 14), a man called Gálmr from the farm of Dynhagi, close to Möðruvellir and Laugaland, was with Önundr. Yet he is described by the saga as also being a friend of Guðmundr and Kolbeinn Tumason, and so the latter pair offered him the chance to escape. Gálmr chose to stay and presumably died in the fire.<sup>46</sup> Tjörvi from Rauðalækur, a farm midway between Bakki and Laugaland, is also granted a truce by Guðmundr's party but dies of his wounds.

Occasional clues also show that connections between households were plentiful and that territorial divisions should not be exaggerated. Kálfr Guttormsson, for example, who was Guðmundr's kinsman by marriage, lived at Auðbrekka and was targeted by Þorgrímr alikarl's party as part of Þorgrímr's attempt to avenge Önundr. Þorgrímr's party seems to have been singling out Guðmundr's kin living in lower Hörgárdalur and, having just failed to attack a kinsman of Guðmundr's at Langahlíð, made for Kálfr. Kálfr was saved from death, however, because of his friendship with one of the attackers (ch. 23).

### *Regional Communities*

The social relationships or collective activities detailed above must have been what community was about for most of the population in medieval Iceland most of the time. It is also important to note, if only briefly here, that supralocal communities of landowners — the *goðorðsmenn* and *höfðingjar* — were not insignificant. The geographical dimensions of these relationships are particularly significant for this discussion because they show up the real social power which the likes of Guðmundr dýri and his peers had.

<sup>46</sup> J. V. Sigurðsson, 'Heimili, þingmennska, frændur og vernd á þjóðveldisöld', in *Íslenska söguþingið* 28.–31. maí 1997, I, 107–16 (p.111); S. Jakobsson, 'Griðamál á ófriðaröld', in *ibid.*, I, 117–34 (p.127).



The connection of Ögmundur Þorvarðsson with Fnjóskadalur provides a very interesting example of how some wealthy men could impose their power on some valleys which were not very close to their home. Ögmundur's reappearance in Iceland after his extended absence in Norway was characterized by his ability to use his sister's farm (Draflastaðir) as a base for unreasonable actions against the people of Fnjóskadalur. Although *Guðmundar saga dýra* seems to take against Ögmundur, the kinds of crime he commits and the place he commits them may suggest something of the geo-political realities. Ögmundur is alleged to have slept with two women from families which actively supported Ögmundur's father, Þorvarðr, who lived in Fornastaðir (probably) and Laufás. In neither case is this the kind of hospitality which the kinsmen of these women had in mind, even if they were Þorvarðr's supporters. The key thing is that these episodes show that Þorvarðr had support in Fnjóskadalur, even though it is not obvious that he had supporters in the districts between Hörgárdalur and Fnjóskadalur. Political communities and political allegiances could span the landscape in ways which might not be expected as a result of physical geography.

Fnjóskadalur is perhaps atypical, but there could clearly be clusters of support for particular chieftains in particular districts which formed another layer of social complexity. Elsewhere, there are more mundane examples of this. Guðmundr dýri owned farms in upper Skagafjörður at one stage which no doubt owed allegiance to him. In the case of both Fnjóskadalur and Guðmundr's Skagafjörður farms it is probable that political needs and economic needs combined. The earliest *máldagi* for the church at Glæsibær,<sup>47</sup> at the mouth of Hörgárdalur, owned woodland in Fnjóskadalur which was a valuable resource unlikely to have been plentiful in Hörgárdalur. Guðmundr's Skagafjörður properties (Hálfðanartunga and Uppsá-lir, ch.10) were no doubt better than many he could have had in Hörgárdalur.

As well as chieftains' economic strategies which allowed a geographically more dispersed political community to operate, there were more straightforward political allegiances which clearly mattered in court and in the enforcement of legal action with physical force. Kolbeinn Tumason's regular support of Guðmundr dýri was invaluable to the latter on several occasions; Sæmundr Jónsson (from the south of Iceland), the Sturlungar clan (from the west), and others, served to influence events at the *Alþing* (e.g. ch. 15) which had an impact at a regional level. Thus the social networks of relatively small-time chieftains reached across Iceland, even if they rarely stepped outside their own region.

<sup>47</sup> *Diplomatarium Islandicum*, III, 520.

## Conclusions

The saga demonstrates a willingness of the most powerful figures in the district to be at peace with most (less powerful) people because they obviously know each other. Guðmundr dýri, about whom we know most, was moderate in his treatment of some local people caught up in the *Önundarbrenna*. At the same time he was keen to punish individuals whom he regarded as real enemies, such as Björn Steinmóðarson. Kolbeinn Tumason, from outside Hörgárdalur, was more moderate in his attitude to Björn but at the same time prepared to raid the valley on his way out, not having to concern himself with the opposition of people who lived close to him. The different reactions of Guðmundr and Kolbeinn serve to show the varying kinds of social relations which appear in *Guðmundar saga dýra*: Guðmundr had to be more cautious because he lived in a reasonably close-knit community which could be reasonably well defined geographically.

Community in late twelfth-century Iceland had several dimensions. It was indeed shaped by geography and distance from one's home: the parish and/or *breppur* produced one form of social connection for everyone. At the same time, the mobility of people at all levels of society cannot be underestimated — travel and movement between households every year meant that individuals formed relationships with a wide range of people, often outside their parish and outside their blood relationships. The need for some kind of patron (*goðorðsmaðr*) for most heads of households meant that they formed part of a wider political community too, which is what most saga action focuses on. People living tens, or even hundreds, of kilometres apart formed part of the same interest group because, at certain times, they shared a common enemy. While the most important kind of community was the local one, formed by human and physical geography, the reality was that life was far more complicated, and the relief map can never fully explain the varied kinds of social connection which medieval Icelanders of all levels of society actually had.

## COMMUNITIES OF DISPERSED SETTLEMENTS: SOCIAL ORGANIZATION AT THE GROUND LEVEL IN TENTH- TO THIRTEENTH-CENTURY ICELAND

Orri Vésteinsson

I once worked as a research assistant in a project on the Icelandic family. The project dealt with the Icelandic family in modern society,<sup>1</sup> but my brief was to look at the historical dimension, to see if some of the characteristics of the modern phenomenon could be explained or put into context by its history.

One of the things I found — and one that has stuck in my mind since — is the almost complete lack of courting rituals in early modern Icelandic society. This is in stark contrast to places even like Norway where people also lived in separate farms rather than villages.<sup>2</sup> Indeed there was in early modern Iceland a distinct absence of traditional or regular social gatherings where individuals could meet people other than those of their own household or farm. Sunday Mass was of course the major exception, but apart from that it seems that people, women in particular, had very few occasions to travel beyond their own farm and the majority of Icelanders would perhaps spend most of their lives in the company of no more than five to fifteen people. While modern courting and dating rituals in the West are basically urban and bourgeois customs they do ultimately derive from the conditions of rural life, the villages and towns that created the framework for the life of the majority of Europeans until the nineteenth century. In contrast, modern urban and bourgeois Icelanders do not, as a rule, practise such rituals and tend to just get on with it when it comes to mating. Whether one

<sup>1</sup> S. Júlíusdóttir, *Den kapabla familjen i det isländska samhället: en studie om lojalitet, äktenskapsdynamik och psykosocial anpassning* (Göteborg, 1993).

<sup>2</sup> D. Gaunt, *Familjeliv i Norden* (Stockholm, 1983), pp.23–40.

considers this barbaric or pragmatic it seemed to me that the basic difference in this respect between Iceland and more or less everywhere else was to do with settlement patterns. That because Icelanders lived in isolated farms — with an average household size of 6.15 in 1703<sup>3</sup> — and had very few occasions to socialize with people from other farms, the conditions were simply never created for any sort of courting rituals, especially not of the sort described for the Norwegian countryside where large groups of young people paid social calls on each other.

There are a number of problems with this reasoning. Aristocratic courting, for instance, is not dependent on geographic proximity; yet Icelandic aristocrats seem not to have bothered any more than the general populace. So maybe the reason is somehow more cultural. It is, for example, no doubt relevant that in the seventeenth century Church and state connived in successfully banning horse-fighting and dances, both major occasions for gatherings of large groups of people, the debauchery attendant on the latter, in particular, worrying the puritanical authorities no end. So maybe it is the puritan influence on Icelandic culture that is to blame.

I am not going to try to solve this problem here — suffice it to say that I think that dispersed settlement can at most have been a contributing reason to the absence of courting rituals in modern Icelandic culture. Indeed I want to use this occasion to argue the opposite: that in the Viking Age and high medieval times at least, Icelanders lived in well-defined communities and that while the settlement patterns of these communities were often quite dispersed they had a cohesion that betrays their conceptual origin as hamlets or villages.

### *The Archaeology of Communities*

One of the problems facing archaeologists who excavate settlements is defining the social context of their settlements. In the cases of villages or towns it is normally taken for granted that each of them constituted a community — a place where three or more families live in close proximity must in fact constitute a community in some sense. It may not, however, be the whole story. Small settlements, hamlets or small villages, may for instance belong to much larger communities, which may be — in a number of ways — more significant for their inhabitants than their day-to-day dealings with their closest neighbours. Likewise large villages

<sup>3</sup> *Hagskinna: Sögulegar hagtölur um Ísland*, ed. G. Jónsson and M. S. Magnússon (Reykjavík, 1997), p.140.

and towns may consist of multiple communities, where individuals and families living within earshot of each other may have little or no common interests or dealings. In both these cases, hamlets on the one hand and towns on the other, the obvious archaeological definition of community, based on the proximity of dwellings to each other, may not at all be the most significant for understanding the working of the settlements.

In the cases of isolated, single household, settlements, archaeologists are normally more aware of the lack of social context, although it is not unfair to say that this does not as a rule seem to cause them much concern. There is, however, every reason to be concerned about this as agricultural settlements cannot exist in complete isolation. It is arguable that they must always belong to some larger community and that without an understanding of this broader context the archaeologists will not be able to appreciate properly the nature of the settlement they have unearthed.

For medieval Europe documents provide the general background and archaeologists can assume that their settlement belonged to a **parish**\* and that it had some tenurial, fiscal or other ties of obligation with places elsewhere. Medieval archaeologists sometimes try to relate individual excavated settlements to a parish church and seigneurial centre, but rarely are archaeological criteria used to try and define the limits of communities — to define which other settlements belonged to the same community as the one under study. In contrast, this sort of work is commonplace in many areas of prehistoric archaeology, where emphasis is placed on identifying settlement hierarchies and describing the extent and possible interrelationships of the settlement units.<sup>4</sup>

Without place-name evidence or written sources prehistoric archaeologists are, however, faced with severely limited opportunities to understand the nature of the interrelationships between settlements of different ranks or tiers. They tend to rely on fairly simplistic models developed by historical geography to rank settlements. Central place theory and other such tools are used to create a sense of a political landscape where large settlements/public architecture/rich artefact collections are seen to equal centres of power and authority, and the relative absence of these features are seen as indicators of dependence and subordination. The number of definable tiers of settlement types is then seen as an indicator of social complexity. Conventional archaeological methods cannot do much more

<sup>4</sup> See e.g. discussion in J. Yeager and M. A. Canuto, 'Introducing an Archaeology of Communities', in *The Archaeology of Communities: A New World Perspective*, ed. M. A. Canuto and J. Yeager (London and New York, 2000), pp.1–15 (pp.3–5).

than that, yet it is obvious that they can only produce the most general picture of the interrelationship of settlements, and will indeed not pick up on most of the significant patterns in the settlement structure of any given society. Historical archaeology is much better placed to study such patterns, and should be doing so, not only to understand better the historical societies it deals with, but also because a systematic study of the archaeological, historical and toponymic evidence for settlements should result in a better general understanding of settlement patterns which could then be applied to the study of prehistoric societies. Without offering any firm results or simple solutions, the following is intended as a contribution to such an effort.

### *North Atlantic Settlement Patterns*

It is commonplace in Scandinavian archaeology and settlement studies to point to the fact that settlement patterns change fundamentally along the border where coniferous forest takes over from the deciduous woodlands of southern Scandinavia. In Denmark, southern Sweden and the very southernmost part of Norway, settlement patterns are dominated by villages; whereas in the northern — coniferous — areas settlement patterns are more dispersed, characterized by single farmsteads.<sup>5</sup> The latter pattern is also found in the largely treeless North Atlantic islands colonized by Scandinavians in the Viking Age: the Northern Isles of Scotland, the Faroes, Iceland and Greenland. In the most general terms it is obvious that this pattern is dictated by the environment: the less productive lands of the north cannot sustain the same density of population as in more southerly latitudes, resulting in smaller and more dispersed settlement units. This generalization is, however, only useful in the broadest discussion of settlement types and social structure. If one wants to take a closer look at individual regions and attempt to understand the actual relationship between settlement patterns and social structure in particular localities, it becomes an obstacle to understanding.

A good example of how fundamental the idea about isolated settlements in the north is, and at the same time how wrong it can be, is provided by Faroese

<sup>5</sup> Needless to say this generalization hides a complex and highly debated issue, well represented by a collection of papers under the collective heading 'Together or Apart – The Problem of Nucleation and Dispersal of Settlement', in C. Fabech and J. Ringtved, eds, *Settlement and Landscape: Proceedings of a Conference in Århus, Denmark May 4–7 1998* (Moesgård, 1999), pp.125–202.

settlement patterns.<sup>6</sup> The Faroes are a small archipelago midway between Shetland and Iceland, comprising some seventeen inhabited islands, most of which rise sharply from the sea with only very limited lowland along the coasts, mostly in short coastal valleys. The Faroes were settled by the Norse in the ninth century, and by the sixteenth century the colony consisted of some eighty-five settlements (pl. *bygðir*\*), each comprising one or more *fyrndarbýlingur*\* (sing. 'old farm') which in turn could be subdivided into farmsteads and households. Many of the *bygðir* had their own church and constituted separate parishes but many did not — at least not in early modern times. Those that did not belonged to the parish of a church in a neighbouring, often quite distant, *bygð* (sing.). The concept of the *fyrndarbýlingur* is obviously related to the Icelandic one of *lögbylí*\* — a taxable unit of a certain value which can be bought and sold and may contain any number of farmsteads and households, although the ideal was clearly that there was only one main household per *lögbylí*. The *fyrndarbýlingar* (pl.) were the basic conceptual units in the Faroese settlement system, at least from the point of view of landowners and the administration. For the archaeologist or geographer looking at the map it seems more natural, however, to consider the *bygð* as the most important unit of settlement. A *bygð* is in most cases a sharply defined stretch of lowland typically occupied by one to four *fyrndarbýlingar* and a much greater number of households, at least in early modern times. The farmsteads in a *bygð* are, as a rule, not ordered in any particular way but scattered around an infield defined by a common boundary — a head dyke. Each *bygð* typically consisted of scores, if not hundreds, of people and can easily be classified as a hamlet or small village. The *bygð* had defined functions, especially in regards to the management of the outfield which was shared proportionately between the farms in each *bygð*. Yet it was the *fyrndarbýlingur* which became the basic unit for taxation and property transactions, a unit which seems almost artificial as it reflects neither the geographical unity of the *bygð* nor the actuality of the farmsteads and households. Each *fyrndarbýlingur* represents a grouping of farmsteads and households, normally into one main — conceived as original or central — farmstead and a varying number of satellite households of lower social and economic status. The idea is obviously that each *bygð* originally only had one, two or three *fyrndarbýlingar*

<sup>6</sup> A. Thorsteinsson, 'On the Development of Faroese Settlements', in *Proceedings of the Eighth Viking Congress Århus 24–31 August 1977*, ed. H. Bekker-Nielsen, P. Foote and O. Olsen (Odense, 1981), pp.189–202; S. V. Arge, 'Føroysk búsetingarsøga – tær fornfrøðiligu heimildirnar', in *Frændafundur*, vol. II, ed. T. Sigurðardóttir and M. Snædal (Tórshavn, 1997), pp.41–58; S. V. Arge, 'Í Uppistovubeitinum: Site and Settlement', *Fróðskaparrit*, 45 (1997), 27–44.

which then became subdivided at some undisclosed date after the settlement period and before early modern times.

This notion of original large farm units which later have become subdivided is of very ancient standing in the Nordic world, and has influenced both medieval administrative practices as well as modern scholarship — not least in Norway where place-name studies have attached great significance to this idea.<sup>7</sup>

It is of course significant that in the Faroes — as well as in Norway and Iceland — the basic proprietary and fiscal units do not necessarily coincide with the physical conglomerations of farms. That, however, is no different from anywhere else and it only represents one aspect of the settlement system, and for the purposes of people's everyday lives and relations probably one of the less significant.

The Faroese settlement pattern is fairly homogeneous, much more so than the varied, and more generally dispersed, settlement structure of Iceland. It serves well, though, as an introduction to the Icelandic patterns as it shares all the basic features of the latter.

### *Icelandic Settlement Structure*

In order to define the settlement structure in Iceland two issues need to be dealt with. First a definition of the physical relationships between settlements has to be established. Is the settlement pattern really dispersed? How dispersed is it? How much variation is there in the dispersal? What is an isolated farm and how isolated is it really? Second, indications for groupings and associations of settlements need to be recognized and characterized.

To start to deal with the first issue, eight study areas were selected based on a rough division of Iceland's inhabited areas into four settlement types: valley, plain, fjord and coast.<sup>8</sup> Two 12x12 km areas were selected to represent the range within each type. The results are summarized in Table 5.1 and the patterns are shown in Fig. 5.1. This sample is neither comprehensive nor random, but it does at least provide a sizeable dataset that can serve as the basis for the argument of this essay — more work is obviously needed for a full treatment of Icelandic settlement patterns. In this discussion use is made of early modern tax-value and census data to qualify the geographical information. This is based on the widely accepted

<sup>7</sup> E.g. M. Olsen, *Farms and Fanes of Ancient Norway* (Oslo, 1928).

<sup>8</sup> O. Vésteinsson, *The Christianization of Iceland: Priests, Power, and Social Change 1000–1300* (Oxford, 2000), pp.12–15, describes the first three types.

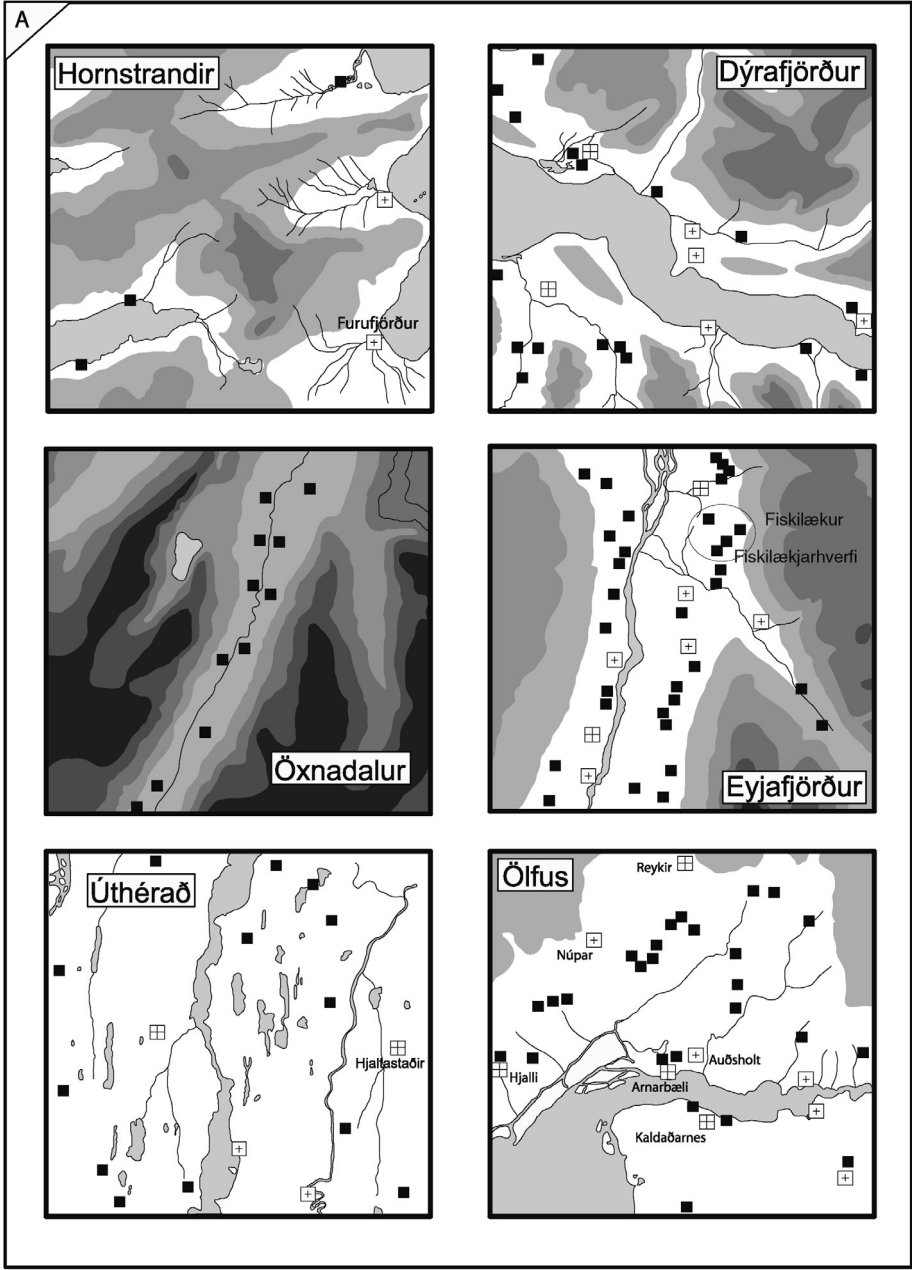


Table 5.1. Geographical and demographic data for the eight study areas shown on Figure 5.1.

Area	Total area habitable km <sup>2</sup>	No. of farms in 1695	No. of households in 1703	No. of people in 1703	Mean household size in 1703	km <sup>2</sup> per farm in 1695	km <sup>2</sup> per household in 1703	No of people per km <sup>2</sup> in 1703	Closest distance to nearest neighbour in m	Greatest distance to nearest neighbour in m	Mean distance to nearest neighbour in m
<b>Hornstrandir – dispersed fjord settlement</b>	22.3	5	7	43	6.14	4.46	3.18	1.93	2516	4091	3254
<b>Dýrafjörður – dense fjord settlement</b>	55.2	23	60	338	5.63	2.40	0.92	6.12	162	2794	986
<b>Öxnadalur – planned valley settlement</b>	17.4	11	10	60	6.00	1.58	1.74	3.45	551	2258	943
<b>Eyjafljörður – dense valley settlement</b>	57	40	57	320	5.61	1.43	1.00	5.51	172	1931	710
<b>Úthérað – dispersed plain settlement</b>	121	17	23	172	7.48	7.11	5.26	1.42	1153	3816	2039
<b>Ölfus – dense plain settlement</b>	99.9	35	89	558	6.27	2.85	0.89	5.58	282	2526	732
<b>Grindavík – nucleated coastal settlement</b>	(62.3)	7	34	185	5.44	(8.90)	(1.83)	(2.96)	720	3513	1449
<b>Innnes – dense coastal settlement</b>	78	64	192	1053	5.48	1.22	2.46	13.5	157	2281	628
<b>Totals/Averages</b>	513.1	202	472	2729	5.78	2.54	1.09	5.32			

Notes

Habitable area is defined as all dry land (i.e. excluding sea, rivers and lakes) under 200 m above sea level. In the case of Grindavík the largest part of this area is lava fields with limited vegetation. That means that the areal figures for that area are not comparable to the others. The number of farms is based on a register from 1695 (edited in Björn Lárússon, *The Old-Icelandic Land Registers*) which lists all the *lögbyli* in Iceland, preferred over the 1703 census which is household-based and is not concerned in the same degree with defining the status of farms. Household numbers and population figures are based on the census. Nearest-neighbour measurements are taken between farms of the 1695 register from the 1:100,000 scale maps of Iceland published by Landmælingar Íslands. The accuracy of the measurements is within 50 m.



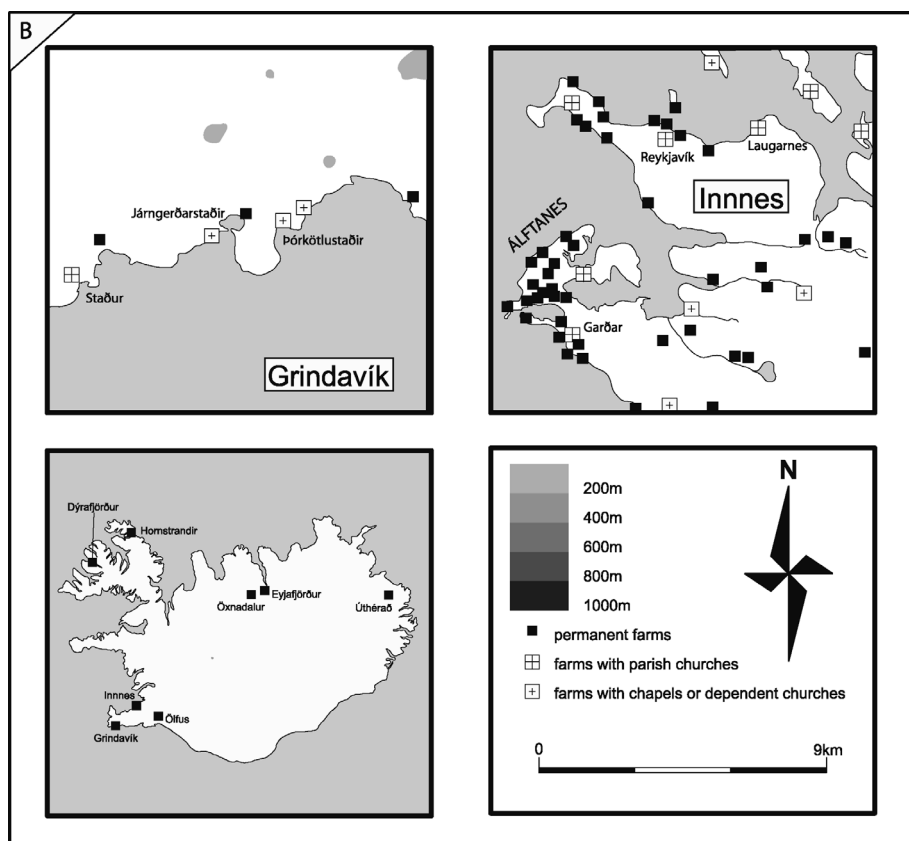


Figure 5.1 (left and above). Eight study areas representing different settlement types in Iceland: fjord (Hornstrandir, Dýrafjörður), valley (Öxnadalur, Eyjafjörður), plain (Úthérað, Ölfus) and coast (Grindavík, Innnes).

assumption that settlement patterns remained largely unchanged from the settlement period in the ninth to tenth centuries until the onset of industrialization in the late nineteenth century.<sup>9</sup> If this is true, the early modern data can be used to give approximate ideas about conditions in the Viking Age and High Middle Ages. Although reservations must be made for individual cases, this assumption

<sup>9</sup> B. Lárusson, *The Old-Icelandic Land Registers* (Lund, 1967), pp.32–33; O. Vésteinsson, T. H. McGovern and C. Keller, 'Enduring Impacts: Social and Environmental Aspects of Viking Age Settlement in Iceland and Greenland', *Archaeologia Islandica*, 2 (2002), 98–136 (pp.117–18).

is supported here in order to bring out the main characteristics of Icelandic settlement patterns.

While this is not apparent from the study areas (although see discussion of Grindavík below) there were villages — in the sense of a clustered settlement with multiple farms and households — in Iceland before the nineteenth century. There were not many, though, and they were in no way typical of Icelandic rural life. They are important in the context of this discussion, however, as they show which conditions were needed for dense settlement to develop in Iceland. Icelandic pre-industrial villages are of two types. One is the fishing village found in a few off-shore islands, like Vestmannaeyjar (330 souls in 56 households in 1703<sup>10</sup>), Flatey in Breiðafjörður (106 in 21 households), Bjarneyjar in Breiðafjörður (85 in 13 households) and in Grímsey (87 in 17 households), and in coastal settlements like Stokkseyri (140 in 27 households), Selvogur (114 in 23 households), Arnarstapi (147 in 32 households), Hellnar (194 in 42 households), Rif (106 in 26 households) and Hellissandur (243 in 61 households). Except for Grímsey all these major concentrations of people are found in the south-west and west (Fig. 5.2). Many of these villages were also seasonal fishing stations, the population of which might multiply several times in late winter and early spring.<sup>11</sup> Of the other type of pre-industrial village there is only the one example, the farming village Þykkvibær in Holt (68 persons in 15 households; for the meaning of *bær*\*, see glossary). Þykkvibær is distinguished from other rural clusters of households (see below) not by its size but by having a village lay-out (a double line of farms on either side of a street, although probably organic rather than planned) and no central household, in fact not even a church. For the fishing villages at least it is normally postulated that they are an early modern phenomenon, the consequence of the rise of commercial fishing in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. This is by no means certain however — commercial fishing may have started much earlier and fishing does not need to be commercialized to become the basis for subsistence of large groups of people. About the population of Þykkvibær in the Middle Ages nothing is known, although the most plausible explanation for the place-name itself is that it refers to the density of the settlement (from adj. *þykkur* ‘thick, dense’)<sup>12</sup> which can be taken as an indication for the antiquity of this village.

<sup>10</sup> *Manntal á Íslandi árið 1703 tekið að tilhlutan Árna Magnússonar og Páls Vídalíns* (Reykjavík, 1924–47).

<sup>11</sup> L. Kristjánsson, *Íslenzkir sjávarhettir* (Reykjavík, 1982), II, 34–63.

<sup>12</sup> Á. Óla, *Þúsund ára sveitahorp: Úr sögu Þykkvabæjar í Rangárfingi* (Reykjavík, 1962), p.30.

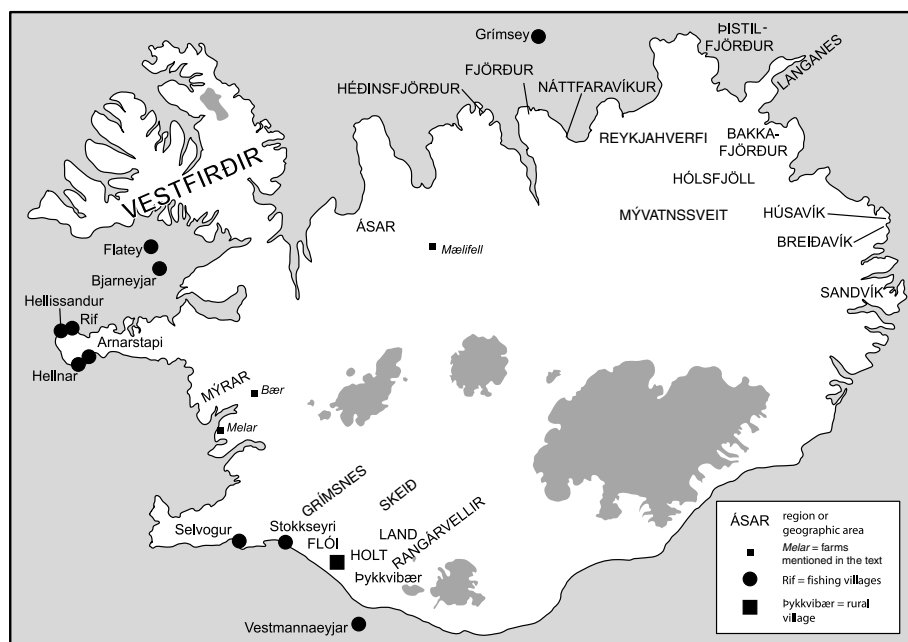


Figure 5.2. Iceland. Places and regions mentioned in the text.

Such villages are, however, clearly anomalous and most Icelanders in the Viking Age and medieval times lived in more dispersed settlements. The eight study areas can be divided into two, based on the distance of a farm to its nearest neighbour. These vary enormously, from 157 m to more than 4 km, but in the majority of the study areas the average distance between neighbouring farms is within 1 km. The three study areas which have longer average distances than 1 km represent only 15% of all the farms and can all be considered anomalous, albeit for different reasons.

Hornstrandir represents an area of truly isolated farms, where not only are distances between settlements great but the roads are also very difficult and most transport was by sea. Many of the farms in this and similar areas were not permanently occupied and such areas were the first to be abandoned in periods of economic downturn. Of the five farms occupied in this area in 1703 one had only two souls and one had four, whereas in another (Furufjörður) there were three households with twenty-three persons between them. This type of settlement is only found in the north-west (Vestfirðir), far north (e.g. Hédinsfjörður, Fjörður, Náttfaravíkur), north-east (Langanes) and eastern seaboard (e.g. Húsavík, Breiðavík, Sandvík), and represents at most 3% of all farms in the country. Grindavík is



Photo 5.1. Fjord settlement. Dalatangi, E-Iceland. Photo: Oddur Sigurðsson.

also an anomalous type of settlement, but of a very different kind. Here the household and population figures show that each farm is really a hamlet of its own: Járngerðarstaðir with forty-four persons in eleven households; Þórkötlustaðir with thirty persons in six households; and Staður with forty persons in five households. Each of these clusters was commonly called *hverfi*\* (e.g. Staðarhverfi), one of the Icelandic terms for neighbourhood or hamlet.

Unlike Innnes, where post-medieval fragmentation accounts in part for the large number of farms in 1695, in Grindavík the farm units have been unchanged since the fourteenth century at least, but it is not known whether the farms were as densely populated in medieval times as they were in the beginning of the eighteenth century. For Grindavík the nearest neighbour figures therefore do not give a balanced idea of social relations. Quite unlike the people of Hornstrandir, the people of Grindavík lived in densely populated clusters separated by flat — if barren — land. In terms of farms the Grindavík settlement pattern is even rarer than the Hornstrandir one, representing less than 1% of all the farms in the country. In terms of population, however, the proportion is presumably considerably higher.

Úthérað is the third study area with long distances between farms and the only one of the three that can be considered as representative for a significant number of Icelandic settlements, possibly some 10% to 20% of all farms in the country. Similar patterns are found in the leaner parts of many plains environments in Iceland: for example, Mýrar in Borgarfjörður; Grímsnes and parts of Skeið and Flói in Árnesþing (for *þing*\*, see glossary); parts of Holt, Landssveit and Rangárvellir in Rangárþing; Ásar in Húnaþing; the flat coastal areas of the north-east such as in Bakkafjörður and Þistilfjörður; and highland plateau settlements like Hólsfjöll and Mývatnssveit. Many of these areas are also characterized by low taxation values, presumably reflecting the limited productivity of such flatlands. They are also characterized by single household farms, with five to ten souls on each farm.

In settlements of this type communications were as a rule relatively easy although the distances are often quite long. The main obstacles tend to be large rivers and extensive bogs, barriers that pose greater problems in summer than winter. Unlike Hornstrandir where the farms could be effectively isolated for months during the winters, in areas like Úthérað communications will have been easiest once the bogs and rivers froze over, making winter, rather than summer, the time when people could meet more easily. This may have been quite significant as winter effectively represents more than half the year and is also the time when people had the greatest leisure. Úthérað therefore represents a truly dispersed settlement with small single family farms separated by considerable distances. There is some clustering — one in the lower left-hand and the other in the upper right-hand corner of the map — but even in these the distances between the farms are always more than 1 km.

In the five other study areas the settlement is denser and in places so dense that it is justifiable to classify the clusters as hamlets. It is, however, important to note that even in the areas of densest settlement, like Innnes, Ölfus and Eyjafjörður, there are a few farms that are located 2 km or more from their nearest neighbour. In these areas of denser settlement two main types of patterns can be discerned. Öxnadalur represents a good example of a planned settlement with a string of farms evenly distributed on either side of a narrow valley.<sup>13</sup> As in Úthérað these are all single household farms with low taxation values, in fact more uniformly so. In the other areas similar, but shorter, strings of more or less uniformly small

<sup>13</sup> O. Vésteinsson, 'Patterns of Settlement in Iceland: A Study in Prehistory', *Saga-Book of the Viking Society*, 25 (1998), 1–29 (pp.20–23); Vésteinsson, McGovern and Keller, 'Enduring Impacts', p.121.

single household farms are also found. In Innnes they are found in the lower left-hand quadrant of the map whereas in the remaining three areas, Dýrafjörður, Eyjafjörður and Ölfus, they cannot be discerned from the spatial arrangement alone. In Eyjafjörður the majority of the farms have single households and there is hardly any clustering, but differentiation is evident in the taxation values and variations in the size of the holdings. Many of the farms with low taxation values have limited access to mountain pasture and therefore probably represent planned settlements.<sup>14</sup>

In Dýrafjörður, Ölfus and Innnes the patterns are characterized by clustering. In Dýrafjörður most of the farms have multiple households, and two have as many as seven, with more than thirty persons on each. In the lower left-hand corner of the map there are two clusters made up of three farms each. These are all small farms in terms of taxation values but they all have multiple households, so that one cluster has seven households and thirty-nine souls whereas the other has five households and twenty-six souls. These two clusters may represent satellites from Sandar, a major estate<sup>15</sup> with a parish church (*sóknarkirkja\**, cf. *sókn\**) at the confluence of the two rivers draining the valleys in which the two clusters are found.

These clusters are reminiscent of the Faroese settlement patterns discussed above, where settlements are closely confined by topography but where farming units have been defined on some completely different premises. In Ölfus such clusters of small farms with multiple households are also found, especially towards the upper left-hand corner of the square. A different type of cluster is found on either side of the large river running across the lower half of the square. On the northern bank there is a cluster of four farms which is in fact a village of sixteen households and ninety-four souls. At the core of this village there is a major estate, Arnarbæli, to which most of the households belong. On the periphery there are two much smaller farms, one single household farm and one with three households and twenty-three persons. The last mentioned, Auðsholt, had its own **chapel\*** (*bænbús\**, referred to in the fourteenth century<sup>16</sup> but presumably dating back to the eleventh) and therefore presumably constitutes a unit the independence of which vis-à-vis Arnarbæli must be of considerable antiquity.

<sup>14</sup> Vésteinsson, 'Patterns of Settlement', p.22, Fig. 8, shows the subdivisions on the western side of the valley.

<sup>15</sup> 'Estate' is here used to describe large holdings with multiple households, of which one is central, usually associated with a church.

<sup>16</sup> *Diplomatarium Islandicum eða Íslenzkt fornbréfasafn 834–1600*, 16 vols (Copenhagen and Reykjavík, 1853–1976), IV, 92.





Photo 5.2. Valley settlement. Fnjóskadalur, N-Iceland. Photo: Oddur Sigurðsson.

On the south bank of the river a cluster of three farms is the more centralized estate of Kaldaðarnes with thirteen households and seventy-seven persons. The estate also included the single farm at the lower edge of the map which is, in fact, a small cluster of five households and twenty-five persons. Similar clusters are also found in Innnes, but in Álfanes, the more southerly of the two main peninsulas shown on the map, there is also a very tight cluster of a slightly different kind. In the cluster of eight farms on the northern side of the inlet, which nearly cuts the peninsula off from the mainland, no one farm or household can be considered as the core and all can be described as modest holdings. Together they had twenty-four households and 138 persons in 1703.

To sum up the discussion so far we have seen that Icelandic settlement patterns are far from homogeneous. There is considerable range within the country, from dense settlements that can only be described as villages to truly isolated farms. Most Icelanders lived, however, in neither type of settlement but in farms of one to two households within 1 km of the nearest neighbour. One kilometre hardly represents isolation — a ten- to fifteen-minute walk in normal terrain — and is no hindrance to people who are intent on meeting each other. It is,

however, a significant distance in that it restricts accidental meetings and limits the degree to which neighbours can monitor what is going on in other households. The social life in such settlements is therefore significantly different from that of villages. Whether settlements of this type represent communities is the issue we turn to next.

### *Reconstructing Icelandic Communities*

There are several different types of evidence that can be brought to bear on the problem of community structure in Iceland. Those that will be considered here are place-names, parish and commune organization, and property associations. Of these the place-names presumably represent the earliest layer of evidence. Most Icelandic farms seem to have been in continuous occupation since the settlement period and to have retained their names throughout — the exceptions to this rule have been identified and described by Ólafur Lárusson.<sup>17</sup> The parish and to a lesser extent commune (see *hreppur*\*) boundaries can in many places be reconstructed for the twelfth to thirteenth centuries and can be considered to also reflect the late or immediately post-Viking Age community structure. Information on ownership is more problematic as comprehensive data only exists from early modern times, but it will be argued here that the structure of church properties, charter evidence for which is available from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, can be considered as representative of late Viking Age settlement patterns.

Icelandic has a few concepts for settlement clustering, ranging from *þorp*\* ('village'), and the much more commonly used *hverfi* ('hamlet, neighbourhood'), to the more general *byggð*\* ('settlement') and *sveit* (originally 'group, company of men'; in a spatial context, 'rural area', 'countryside'). *Þorp* does occur as a description of clusters of farms, particularly in the north-west (e.g. Vaðalsþorp), but there are few, if any, medieval instances of such a usage for Icelandic settlements. *Hverfi* on the other hand is attested in medieval records both as a description of large areas (e.g. Kelduhverfi, Reykjahverfi) and of individual clusters of farms. An example of the latter is Fiskilækjarhverfi mentioned in two thirteenth-century sagas<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Ó. Lárusson, 'Úr byggðasögu Íslands', in *Byggð og saga* (Reykjavík, 1944), pp.9–58 (pp.41–50).

<sup>18</sup> *Eyfirðinga sagnar*, ed. J. Kristjánsson, Íslenzk fornrit, 9 (Reykjavík, 1956), pp.54–55; *Ljósvetninga saga*, ed. B. Sigfússon, Íslenzk fornrit, 10 (Reykjavík, 1940), p.235.

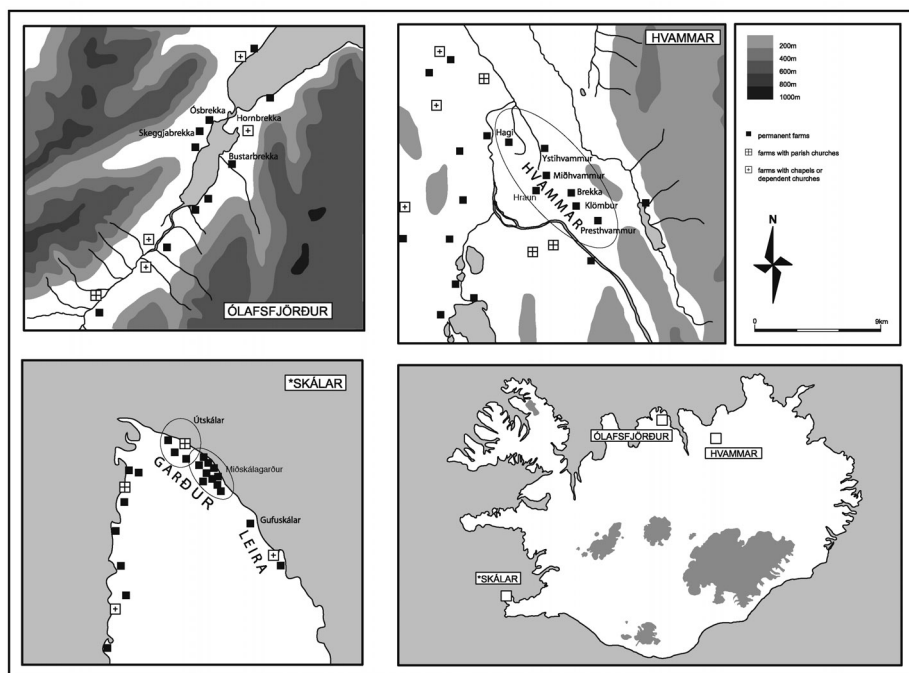


Figure 5.3. Place-name evidence for neighbourhoods in Iceland.

and shown on the map of Eyjafjörður (Fig. 5.1). It is not explained in the saga exactly which farms belong to this unit, but from considering the map and the place-names it is apparent that this name can only have applied to a group of four or five farms on either side of the quite humble brook Fiskilækur — a geographical feature of such insignificance that it can hardly have given a much larger area its name. These four or five farms do not represent a particular clustering, but the name given to them as a group suggests that they must have constituted a community — a hamlet — with a separate identity from the neighbouring farms.

In an area now called Garður in the south-west there is a major farm called Útskálars (Fig. 5.3). Some 3.7 km to the south-east there is another smaller farm called Gufuskálars. The area in between is quite densely settled and in a late thirteenth-century document this is referred to as Miðskálargarður.<sup>19</sup> The common element to all these names is the term *skáli* ('building, hall') and *út* and *mið* are directional concepts meaning 'out (more westerly, closer to the sea)' and

<sup>19</sup> *Diplomatarium Islandicum*, II, 78–80.

‘middle’ respectively. It seems then that this neighbourhood of some forty households and 182 persons in 1703 was originally called \*Skálar<sup>20</sup> implying a single community. This seems to have been conceived of as having three sub-clusters: one major estate with parish church and many dependent households (Útskálar); one cluster of modest holdings (\*Miðskálar); and a single small estate somewhat separated from the other two (Gufuskálar). The first two retained their communal identity in the presumably more recent term Garður, whereas Gufuskálar was in later centuries considered to belong to the area of Leira along with other farms further south.

In Ólafsfjörður in north Iceland there are two adjacent farms now called Ósbrekka and Skeggjabrekka, separated by some 620 m (Fig. 5.3). According to *Guðmundar saga dýra* these farms were both occupied in the late twelfth century; they had adjoining homefields and were both called Brekka.<sup>21</sup> As the purpose of place-names is surely to identify significant elements in the landscape it makes little sense to call adjacent farms the same name unless they are considered to be parts of the same unit. *Brekka* means ‘slope, hillside’ and is an apt description of the landscape in which the farms are situated. They are located on the western side of a large lake on the opposite side of which there is also a hillside with two further farms called \*Brekka (now Bustarbrekka and Hornbrekka). All these farms share a common location on sloping, in fact quite steeply sloping, ground, in contrast to other farms further inland that are all located on the valley floor. It is surely this contrast which has occasioned the name, but the fact that all four farms share the same topographic qualifier could suggest that they were originally conceived of as a unit, and therefore possibly a community.

In Aðaldalur in north-east Iceland there are three farms all called \*Hvammur (Fig. 5.3). The northernmost is Ystihvammur (‘outermost-’), then there is Miðhvammur (‘middle-’) and furthest south is Presthvammur (‘priest’s-’), the last name no doubt originating in the late Middle Ages,<sup>22</sup> presumably because it was owned or occupied by a priest at some point. Its original name is likely to have been \*Syðstihvammur (‘southernmost-’) or \*Fremstihvammur (‘innermost-’). In many cases where adjacent farms share the same name and are distinguished by directional elements (in–out, up–down, north–south, etc.) or by dimensional elements (large–small) it is because an original single farm has become split into

<sup>20</sup> An asterisk in front of a place-name (as here and below) denotes a form that does not occur in any source, but can be reconstructed.

<sup>21</sup> *Sturlunga Saga*, ed. Ö. Thorsson (Reykjavík, 1988), pp.143–44.

<sup>22</sup> *Diplomatarium Islandicum*, v, 111.

two or more, often in early modern times. In cases where adjacent farms are attested under the same name in early records and/or where such farms are separated by other farms with different names it seems, however, that such name-sharing farms may be of similar antiquity. In this case, Presthvammur and Miðhvammur are separated by two farms, Brekka and Klömbur, and the whole area, including the farms Hraun and Hagi was (and still is) called Hvammar (plural of Hvammur).<sup>23</sup> In the thirteenth-century *Reykðela saga* a man is introduced as living in Hvammur, suggesting that the common identity of the cluster was still more significant at that date than that of the individual holdings.<sup>24</sup> *Hvammur* means 'hollow' and clearly describes the dominant landscape feature, a broad and curving hollow into the hillside at the foot of which the farmsteads stand. It seems that initially each of the farmsteads did not have a separate name and that the whole area of fairly dispersed farmsteads was called \*Hvammur, suggesting that this fairly well-defined geographical area also constituted a community with an identity separate from neighbouring farms.

More concrete evidence comes from Neðri-Ás in Hjaltadalur, the central farmstead of a large estate no doubt originally called \*Ás. Here the excavation of an eleventh-century chapel and cemetery revealed that the population using the cemetery is likely to have been considerably larger than the household of the central farmstead. The cemetery was used by a group of thirty to thirty-five people, and the layout of the graves is suggestive of family or household plots within the cemetery. It is suggested that during the eleventh century this cemetery was used by at least five households, all located within what later became the farms Neðri-Ás and Efri-Ás, reflecting their close association and the existence of an \*Ás community.<sup>25</sup>

It is quite common that names of major estates and parish centres are derived from geographical or other features that, rather than being particular to that individual farmstead, describe a larger area (e.g. Melar in Melasveit, Mælifell in Skagafjörður, Garðar in Álftanes). Although it is difficult to prove it seems that such names were originally names for territories, and hence communities. In such cases it seems that the political and economic centre of the community has retained the name but that lesser holdings have acquired new names, often with personal names rather than topographic names as their first element.

<sup>23</sup> E.g. *Diplomatarium Islandicum*, v, 34.

<sup>24</sup> *Ljósvetninga saga*, ed. Sigfússon, p.152.

<sup>25</sup> O. Vésteinsson, *Forn kirkja og grafreitir á Neðra-Ási í Hjaltadal* (Reykjavík, 2000).

### *Parishes as Communities*

In the cases of Fiskilækjarhverfi, \*Brekka and \*Hvammur discussed above, the communities suggested are not clustered at all. They are quite dispersed and without the place-name evidence would not be obviously distinguishable as communities with separate identities. They are also quite small and may all have been originally single holdings. Therefore, either they may represent very early communities, which lost their cohesion when the holdings were divided up and were given individual names, or they can be seen as some sort of sub-communities, neighbourhoods within more structured communities. It is to such structured communities we now turn.

Parishes (*sóknir*) developed in Iceland in the course of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.<sup>26</sup> Each church had a **tithe area**\* — sometimes only the farm it was attached to — but those churches which did not have a resident priest were considered to belong to the parish of one that did. In addition there were chapels to which no tithes or other dues were paid. On this basis it is possible to propose a ranking of farms according to their relationship to a church or chapel. The major distinction is between those farms that had no chapel or church and those that did. The other distinction is between farms with different types of churches. The former distinction represents differences in rank between farms in the early to mid-eleventh century, following the conversion around 1000, when it seems that most churches and chapels were originally built. In this early period of church building it does not seem that there were any significant differences in the sizes or ranks of the churches — they were basically all very small, and presumably private, chapels. Significantly, all the churches and chapels are associated with cemeteries, suggesting that community burial was one of the principal functions of the eleventh-century chapels/churches.<sup>27</sup> Churches and chapels are as a rule found on farms with high taxation values, so the fact that some farmers built churches on their farms and some did not seems to reflect status: the occupants of farms without a church or a chapel probably represent the dependent part of the population, tenants and unfree farmers.

<sup>26</sup> Vésteinsson, *Christianization of Iceland*, pp.101–07, 238–45; O. Vésteinsson, 'Íslenska sóknaskipulagið og samband heimila á miðöldum', *Íslenska sögupingið* 28.–31. maí 1997: *Ráðstefnurit*, 2 vols (Reykjavík, 1998), I, 147–66 (pp.153–59).

<sup>27</sup> O. Vésteinsson, 'The Formative Phase of the Icelandic Church c. 990–1240 AD', in *Church Centres*, ed. H. Þorláksson (Reykjavík, 2005), pp.71–81.

The formation of the parish system, taking off in the twelfth century, further accentuated the differences within the presumably free-holding farming population by creating a ranking system. In this a relatively small number of churches became parish centres and an equally large group retained certain rights and a degree of independence vis-à-vis the parish church to which they were nevertheless subordinate. The majority of the chapels, however, became completely dependent on services from the parish church to which they also had to pay dues. The ranking evident in these differences allows us to distinguish four groups of farms, and the way parishes formed around these is quite revealing of the nature of rural communities in Iceland in the wake of the Viking Age.

Parishes can be divided into two main types. The first is the estate parish where the parish is either made up of a single estate or has a large estate at its core and smaller ones and individual farms on its periphery. Single estate parishes are the exception and in the study areas only two are found, both in Innnes — those of Nes and Reykjavík, with thirty-five and forty households in areas of approximately 3 and 10 km<sup>2</sup> respectively. Before these estates became royal property they were owned and managed by a single landlord each, as far as can be seen members of the aristocracy, who owned the church and hired the priest. The tenants and parishioners therefore had much in common, and many occasions to meet and share their troubles.<sup>28</sup>

Most estates were significantly smaller, typically with five to ten households on the central farm and directly associated holdings (see below). In the case of Laugarnes, also on the Innnes map, there were five households on the estate in 1703, and no directly associated holdings, while ten other farms with sixteen households belonged to the parish.<sup>29</sup> The furthest from Laugarnes — which is not at all centrally located in the parish — was more than 10 km away.

Another similar example is Reykir in Ölfus. Here there was only one household at the central farm itself but six more on the estate, which was quite extensive with more than 2.5 km from the cottage furthest out to the central farm. On either side of the estate there were ten or eleven farms with sixteen households in 1703 that belonged to its parish and paid tithe to Reykir.<sup>30</sup> One of these farms, Núpár, had its own church, the owner of which retained his household's tithe pay-

<sup>28</sup> Ó. Lárusson, 'Hversu Seltjarnarnes byggðist', in *Byggð og saga*, pp.84–122 (pp.114–18); Vésteinsson, 'Íslenska sóknaskipulagið', pp.162–64.

<sup>29</sup> *Diplomatarium Islandicum*, xv, 636.

<sup>30</sup> *Diplomatarium Islandicum*, xii, 662; AM 66a 8<sup>vo</sup>, pp.42a–43a.

ments.<sup>31</sup> This farm is set apart from all the others, in terms of both location and taxation value, and seems to represent a small estate which would have been the next in line to become a parish centre after Reykir and Hjalli on either side of it.

The second type of parish is where the parish church is located on a relatively humble farm, not the area's major estate (which is quite rare), or in areas where there does not seem to have been any single major estate. An example of the latter is Hjaltastaðir in Úthérað. Hjaltastaðir was a larger than average farm but did not compare in the quality of its land to the three farms to its north (off the map), which represent a cluster of equally large holdings occupying the best land available in the area.<sup>32</sup> One of those farms had its own church that retained its own tithes but was serviced from Hjaltastaðir, and there were a further six chapels in the parish which had a total of nineteen farms.

The parish of Hjaltastaðir is an area of very dispersed settlement, the structure of which nevertheless suggests that it can be thought of as a community, whose inhabitants considered each other to be neighbours with a range of common interests. The establishment of the parish church at Hjaltastaðir seems to be the result of a communal effort, witnessed most clearly by its somewhat marginal location and the fact that all the farms in the parish paid an extraordinary due to the church, the feeding of a lamb annually.<sup>33</sup> Such dues can only have been established in the first place if the whole parish was owned by the same individual or family — which seems unlikely although not at all impossible — or if the landowners, a large part of whom presumably were farmers themselves, communally agreed to support their church in this way. In either case common interests are evident.

It is of course a tautology to claim that a parish represents a community. It clearly does so just as larger units — for example, communes (associations of twenty farms or more, normally larger than parishes and often not coterminous with them<sup>34</sup>) or assembly areas (areas of one hundred farms or more attending the same judicial court) — constituted communities in some sense. It does not necessarily follow that these communities were significant for people's identities or everyday behaviour. In the case of the Icelandic parishes, however, they clearly were, to a different degree. Some parishes were densely populated, with a number of other factors than a common church tying people together; others were much

<sup>31</sup> *Diplomatarium Islandicum*, IV, 95–96.

<sup>32</sup> Vésteinsson, McGovern and Keller, 'Enduring Impacts', pp.121–23.

<sup>33</sup> *Diplomatarium Islandicum*, III, 239.

<sup>34</sup> See Callow, this volume.



more dispersed and had few or no other factors helping to create the conditions for community feeling. The basic structure of Icelandic settlements, however, betrays their conceptual origin as small and tightly-knit communities.

I have argued elsewhere that Icelandic settlements can be divided into two: clustered settlements — which come in at least three different types — and planned settlements.<sup>35</sup> The former seem to be primary settlements, those of the greatest antiquity, whereas the latter seem to be secondary, planned and settled after the former type of settlement had been established, presumably in the late ninth century. Planned settlements are by definition modest, single household holdings, most often quite dispersed, of which the Öxnadalur map shows a good example (Fig. 5.1). They represent more than half of all Icelandic farms. When their arrangement into parishes is studied it becomes clear that the planned settlements in each parish occupy the immediate periphery of a clustered settlement, the postulated primary settlement. Some parishes are made up of a single such set (i.e. a cluster plus one or more planned settlements) while others are more complex and may contain remains of more than one set. The church at Núpár mentioned above seems to indicate that the farm originally constituted a part of such a set that later became subsumed in the parish of Reykir.

The reality of such sets can be argued from the endowments of churches that seem mostly to have taken place in the twelfth century.<sup>36</sup> An example can be taken of Laugardælir in Flói (Fig. 5.4). According to its earliest charter the church there owned the whole estate as well as two adjacent farms, Svarfhóll and Uppsálir.<sup>37</sup> They may not have been parts of the original endowment but Svarfhóll, judging from its location and place-name, is likely to have been a part of the original estate. Uppsálir on the other hand is one among many in a strip of modest farms ringing the estate of Laugardælir on the south. The place-name indicates a place upwards from some other place — which in this case can only be Laugardælir as the adjacent farms to Uppsálir are situated on the same slight rise, in an otherwise rather flat landscape. It is arguable then that Uppsálir also belonged to the original estate and that when the owner of Laugardælir decided to endow his church he decided to donate the core of the estate, the central holding, and two of the more peripheral ones, while presumably retaining the rest for his and his heirs' private

<sup>35</sup> Vésteinsson, 'Patterns of Settlement', pp.17–23; Vésteinsson, McGovern and Keller, 'Enduring Impacts', pp.117–25.

<sup>36</sup> Vésteinsson, *Christianization of Iceland*, pp.101–09.

<sup>37</sup> *Diplomatarium Islandicum*, IV, 53.

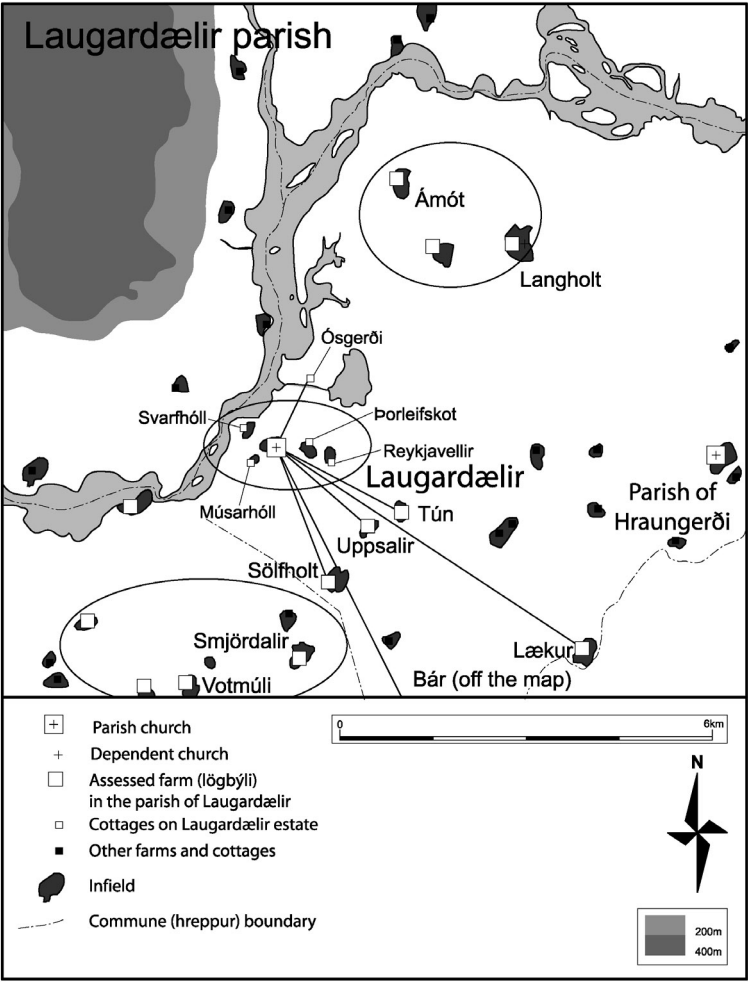


Figure 5.4. Laugardælir parish.

use — farms that in the course of time became sold or inherited in different directions. The reverse took place in Bær in Borgarfjörður in the 1180s where a landowner decided to keep the core of the estate for himself and his heirs but donated three outlying farms to his church.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Vésteinsson, *Christianization of Iceland*, pp.112–13.

In the case of Laugardælir the parish is made up of three sets, the largest and most complex of which is Laugardælir. The estate of Laugardælir seems originally to have consisted of the central farm itself, the church farm Svarfhóll and on average three cottages, Reykjavellir, Þorleifskot and Músarhóll, making up a relatively tight linear settlement. Ringing the estate core are Ósgerði to the north — a farm with unstable occupancy considered as a part of the estate in later centuries — and Tún, Uppsaliir and Sölfholt to the south. Of these Sölfholt was an above average farm in terms of taxation value and had two cottages in 1703 — possibly representing a very early division from the original estate. At least two other farms, Lækur and Bár, both quite modest, are located on a still outer ring.<sup>39</sup> The parish had thirteen farms<sup>40</sup> and five of these were west of Sölfholt, but in a different commune. Commune boundaries often dissect parishes, especially in open landscapes like this one. This seems to indicate that the farms belonging to a different commune from the estate where their parish church is represent separate sets. They represent communities that could thus retain some of their independence vis-à-vis their church lord on the one hand and the leader of their commune on the other (who was most likely the church lord of the adjacent parish). Apart from the one farm by the river, Selfoss, the rest of these make up a linear settlement, quite dense in places, centred on two farms, Smjördalir and Votmúli. On the northern side of Laugardælir there is the third and smallest set. This is made up of three farms, Langholt with a church and cemetery,<sup>41</sup> and two farms at Ámót, with a total of six households in 1703.

### *Conclusions*

The parish of Laugardælir exhibits all the basic elements of the Icelandic settlement structure. It is made up of three neighbourhoods, the central one by far the largest and presumably the earliest and always the most significant in economic and political terms. Belonging to this central neighbourhood is a double line of planned settlements, extending outwards from the estate. On either side of this there are different types of neighbourhoods. On the western side there is a fairly

<sup>39</sup> Compare *Árnessýsla: Sýslu og sóknalýsingar Hins íslenska bókmenntafélags 1839–1843 og Lýsing Ölfubreypp anno 1703 eftir Hálfðan Jónsson*, ed. S. Sigmundsson (Reykjavík, 1979), pp.72–73.

<sup>40</sup> AM 66a 8<sup>vo</sup>, pp.35a–37b.

<sup>41</sup> AM 66a 8<sup>vo</sup>, pp.35a–37b.

dense scatter of modest holdings that have all the hallmarks of planned settlements except that they belong to a different commune from their church lord, indicating a degree of independence and separateness from the church estate. On the northern side of Laugardælir estate there is a much smaller estate with its own church in Langholt and planned settlements in Ámót.

The principal conclusions we can draw from this study are firstly that Icelandic settlements were isolated only in a relative sense. In fact the actual distances between settlements were not very much greater than elsewhere in northern Europe. Rather, the settlements were smaller, with a much higher proportion of single household settlements. Secondly — and more importantly — we can conclude that Icelandic settlements had a structured distribution and that this structure indicates a preference for ordering settlements in such a way that they made up neighbourhoods that, it is argued here, functioned as communities. This suggests that the ties that bound people together and gave them a common identity outweighed the physical distances that separated their settlements. In some cases it seems that despite often-considerable distances between settlements the sense of community was so strong that a formal name only existed for the community, not the individual settlements. This can only have applied to the first generations of settlers and may reflect their original organization, presumably based on ties of kinship and dependency, cooperation and common enemies. At some later date — possibly as early as the tenth century, in other cases maybe not until late medieval times — these communities experienced fission and each settlement got its own formal name and status as a separate property, in effect signalling a loosening of the earlier community ties. Despite this fissioning, the locations of the settlements remained in the vast majority of cases, providing the spatial context for the inhabitants' interrelationships for centuries to come.

Following the introduction of Christianity in the beginning of the eleventh century, a parish system developed. There are no indications that this system was imposed from above. Rather, it grew out of and reflected the settlement organization of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. It is important to stress that this organization may have been significantly different from that of the settlement period of the ninth to tenth centuries. In particular it may be that small communities evidenced by the place-names (based on kinship and colonizing cooperation?) had ceased to be of primary significance and had been superseded by slightly larger communities based more on ties of dependency and tenure. It is argued here, however, that the basic characteristic of early Icelandic settlement was that it was organized into communities, definable neighbourhoods that reflect the shared identity and concerns of their inhabitants. On the basis of the evidence

considered here it is, however, not possible to do more than guess at the nature of these communities, or their importance for their members.

What can be suggested is that from the outset there must have been a very real difference between the communities centred on a great estate with rings of dependent households around them and communities that were made up mainly of planned settlements. As a rule the former type of community had higher population density but greater social and economic differentiation among the inhabitants. In the second type of community the distances between settlements were greater but the households were more alike socially and economically, and may have had shared interests in relation to a common landowner and/or church lord residing outside the community.

I have been concerned here to show that in its structure Icelandic settlement organization betrays its origins as a series of communities, each comprising several farmsteads and households, rather than isolated and independent farmsteads as has been the accepted view. This conclusion has implications for our understanding of the social organization of the settlers of Iceland. It suggests that they were organized into groups of households and that these groups formed the building blocks of the new society, rather than the single family households led by a free farmer normally identified as the basic social unit. This makes the Icelanders less of an anomaly among medieval European societies, and should — I hope — clear the path towards a fuller understanding of the system of government that emerged in Iceland in the course of the tenth and eleventh centuries.

As a general lesson from this I hope to have shown that appearances can be deceptive: dispersed settlement does not necessarily mean a more diffuse social organization. In fact I think the opposite could be argued — but this must await another opportunity.



## BOUNDARIES OF KNOWLEDGE: MAPPING THE LAND UNITS OF LATE ANGLO-SAXON AND NORMAN ENGLAND

Steven Bassett

There is an essential spatial dimension to the continuing debate about the origins of the English parochial system, which led to people's pastoral care being increasingly provided by a local church. It had not always been so. In the late Anglo-Saxon period very large **parishes\***, each one served by a **mother-church\***, are widely held to have existed throughout much, perhaps most, of England; but the question of when they emerged — whether it was in the seventh and early eighth centuries, or not until the tenth century or even later — is still being strenuously disputed. We need to ask, therefore, how and how reliably we can discover the extents of these mother-church parishes, date their origins and grasp the historical significance of their individual shapes and sizes. Secondly, how well can we understand the processes, and chart the stages, by which local communities encouraged and benefited from the slow fission of most of the mother-church parishes — a trend which by 1200 had seen the birth of the familiar parochial geography of recent centuries set fully in motion?<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For the main substance of the debate, see C. N. L. Brooke, 'Rural Ecclesiastical Institutions in England: The Search for their Origins', *Settimane di studio del centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo*, 28 (1982), 685–711; J. Blair, 'Introduction: From Minster to Parish Church', in *Minsters and Parish Churches: The Local Church in Transition, 950–1200*, ed. J. Blair, Oxford University Committee for Archaeology, monograph 17 (Oxford, 1988), pp.1–19; E. Cambridge and D. Rollason, 'The Pastoral Organization of the Anglo-Saxon Church: A Review of the "Minster Hypothesis"', *Early Medieval Europe*, 4 (1995), 87–104; J. Blair, 'Ecclesiastical Organization and Pastoral Care in Anglo-Saxon England', *Early Medieval Europe*, 4 (1995), 193–212; D. Rollason, 'Monasteries and Society in Early Medieval Northumbria', in *Monasteries and Society*

When this spatial dimension has been addressed previously in discussions of the origins of the parochial system, the results have often been invalidated by, for instance, a reliance on late nineteenth- or even twentieth-century maps or the lack of a sufficiently rigorous chronological framing.<sup>2</sup> However, it has usually been overlooked altogether, being considered, one suspects, too unimportant, too unprofitable, and/or too unreliable to justify the large amount of research time needed for its proper study. This is regrettable since it is none of these things. Few historically significant aspects of early medieval life were wholly unaffected by constraints imposed by the formal allocation of space. Individuals may normally have had rather less awareness of the territorial dimensions of the several communities to which they contemporaneously belonged than of the nature of the shared benefits and responsibilities which united each one's members, but that does not mean that none existed.<sup>3</sup> In most areas of life fixed visible boundaries identified the territory of each community to which an individual belonged — whether it was a political and administrative, a socio-economic or an ecclesiastical one — and were an essential physical statement of its members' identity and common interests.

Many Anglo-Saxon and even earlier boundaries, reflecting decisions dictated by a group's or individual's relations with the natural and human landscape, with neighbours, and with their rulers, have survived into the age of accurate map-making and air-photography, sometimes as relict features but frequently by continuing in use. Time spent in trying to map the various overlapping territories within which specific communities operated at a given period, and in understanding what determined each one's extent and how it related physically and institutionally to the others, is therefore rarely wasted. Moreover, when the available evidence allows firm conclusions to be drawn, the rural land units of

*in Medieval Britain*, ed. B. Thompson (Stamford, 1999), pp.59–74; and now J. Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford, 2005), *passim*.

<sup>2</sup> A great many changes were made to English parish boundaries in the course of the nineteenth century, as a result of which almost no Ordnance Survey map can be safely relied on to show unchanged ones (including, despite its title, the 'Index to the Tithe Survey' edition of the Old Series one-inch maps). Only parliamentary enclosure maps and tithe maps (where they are available), most of which pre-date the changes, are a generally reliable source for 'ancient' parish boundaries. For a convenient summary of these changes, see R. J. P. Kain and R. R. Oliver, *The Historic Parishes of England and Wales* (Colchester, 2001), pp.7–8. For an example of the value of assiduous data collection and map work being seriously undermined by poor attention to chronological framing, see T. A. Hall, *Minster Churches in the Dorset Landscape*, British Archaeological Reports, British Series, 304 (Oxford, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> In some contexts, for example in the conduct of commerce, the dimensions were too informal, extended and fluid for the setting-out of lines on the ground to be either useful or viable.



medieval England characteristically show an intimate physical association with one another; and the Church's boundaries, those of landholding and farming, and those of secular administration and justice are found to have coincided, either one-to-one or with one land unit being coterminous with several of another sort.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, since manors are widely accepted as having been the building-blocks of parishes and **hundreds**\* alike,<sup>5</sup> mapping and analyzing the changing geography of the medieval English Church throws light on secular communities and institutions as well as on ecclesiastical ones.

There has been a great deal of debate during the last twenty-five years about the origins of the English parochial system. Everyone agrees that by 1200 most parishes already existed in the form which they would then maintain with few changes until the middle years of the nineteenth century, and in some cases right up to today. There is also general agreement about the later stages of the processes which produced this late medieval and modern parochial geography. By the late Anglo-Saxon period, immediately below the cathedrals were many important churches spread across England which, then as now, were called mother-churches. Each had a parish which was normally far larger than the parishes of the late medieval and modern periods;<sup>6</sup> and almost all the churches of this sort about which we know in detail were already many centuries old by then, having been founded in the missionary phase of Anglo-Saxon Christianity, that is, in the seventh and early eighth centuries. These are often called 'old **minsters**\*' in modern secondary sources.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> For example, P. H. Hase, 'The Mother Churches of Hampshire', in *Minsters and Parish Churches*, ed. Blair, pp.45–66; S. Bassett, 'The Administrative Landscape of the Diocese of Worcester in the Tenth Century', in *St Oswald of Worcester: Life and Influence*, ed. N. Brooks and C. Cubitt (Leicester, 1996), pp.147–73 (pp.160–68).

<sup>5</sup> For example, F. W. Maitland, *Domesday Book and Beyond* (Cambridge, 1897), p.15 and passim; R. Lennard, *Rural England 1086–1135* (Oxford, 1959), pp.5–6, 9, 17. For detailed exemplification: C. D. Drew, 'The Manors of the Iwerne Valley, Dorset', *Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Antiquarian Field Club*, 69 (1948), 45–50; S. Bassett, 'Continuity and Fission in the Anglo-Saxon Landscape: The Origins of the Rodings (Essex)', *Landscape History*, 19 (1997), 25–42.

<sup>6</sup> I use the word parish as defined in the glossary. This usage applies as much to what I refer to here as 'mother-church parishes' as it does to the many much smaller parishes produced by their fission. The nature of available pastoral care is likely to have altered considerably between the seventh century and the twelfth, but not to so great an extent that my use of the term 'parish' is self-evidently inappropriate for any part of this period.

<sup>7</sup> This echoes the term used in Edgar's second law code: *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, ed. F. Liebermann (Halle, 1903), p.196 (II Edgar, §1.1, 2.2).

It is also widely agreed that by the late twelfth century two other, less important sorts of rural church had come to prominence, many of which succeeded in carving out parts of the mother-churches' parishes to form their own much smaller independent ones. One sort were **chapels\*** built in appropriate outlying parts of a mother-church parish and staffed by one or more priests. They were public churches from the outset, set up to help the mother-churches to deliver pastoral care to all parts of their extensive parishes. Each of these **parochial chapels\*** was at first fully subordinate to its mother-church, but in many cases it sooner or later gained independent control of the often large part of the parish which it had been founded to help serve.<sup>8</sup>

Lesser rural churches of the other sort were built in large numbers by laymen in the tenth to twelfth centuries, almost always next to a manor-house. Their initial role may simply have been to offer a suitable venue for the private devotions of the local lord and his household; but in time many manorial chapels gained a public role through being consecrated by the bishop, given a priest, and allowed a measure of pastoral responsibility under the control of the mother-church or parochial chapel in whose area of parochial authority they stood. By the late eleventh century bishops were actively encouraging local lords to build churches, and were assiduous in consecrating them so as to help spread the pastoral load.<sup>9</sup> Eventually, a great many of these manorial chapels managed to break free and become effectively independent parish churches, each one serving as its parish the manor on which it stood.

By 1200 the parochial system of late medieval and modern England had evolved, with only a small number of mother-churches still retaining control of the entirety of their original parish. Most of it was normally being served by the lesser churches, with some of them already independent but others merely beginning to gain parochial rights and not breaking entirely free for decades or even centuries to come. In many areas, therefore, a three-level hierarchy of churches was involved in delivering pastoral care at the sub-diocesan level, with some man-

<sup>8</sup> Compare P. H. Hase, 'The Church in the Wessex Heartlands', in *The Medieval Landscape of Wessex*, ed. M. Aston and C. Lewis, Oxbow Monograph, 46 (Oxford, 1994), pp.47–81 (p.63: 'dependent parochial chapelry').

<sup>9</sup> For example, Wulfstan II of Worcester: *The Vita Wulfstani of William of Malmesbury*, ed. R. R. Darlington (London, 1928), pp.32, 45, 52 ('Per totam parrochiam in sui iuris prediis ecclesias struebat; in alienis ut struerentur instabat'; 'He [Wulfstan] built churches throughout the diocese on his own lands; on other people's he insisted that they should be built'), 54–55 (respectively, II.9, II.22, III.10, III.14–15).

orial chapels being directly subordinate to a mother-church but others only indirectly so because they had been set up in the pastoral area of a parochial chapel.

There is general agreement about these late Anglo-Saxon and later processes in the development of the English parochial system. Where there is disagreement, and it is a strongly entrenched one, it is about the origins of mother-churches and their very large parishes. Even here most scholars agree that 'old minsters' were characteristically founded, diocese-by-diocese, in the seventh and early eighth centuries and endowed by the newly converted Anglo-Saxon kings. We know about some of them from the charters which were issued either at the time of their foundation or at a later date. Each housed a more or, usually, less genuinely monastic community and also a number of priests who ministered to its members.<sup>10</sup> Most of these churches still exist as parish churches but are now largely indistinguishable from the very many churches of later, more lowly origin.

The academic disagreement is focussed on when the 'old minsters' gained a pastoral role — whether from the very start, so that what we see happening in the tenth to twelfth centuries was the transformation of an old, badly failing system; or, alternatively, not until the tenth century or afterwards, prior to which they had had no role in delivering pastoral care. The tenth and eleventh centuries, then, lie at the heart of the battleground. To some scholars this was when the long-established 'minster system' began to be supplanted by a new system based on local churches which typically served either a single manor or no more than a cluster of two or three. To others it was when 'old minsters' first gained parishes: England was being politically unified — a lengthy and unevenly successful process — and its kings were striving to impose some uniformity on it, with one of their measures being to have a parish created around each already old 'old minster' and to give its priests a new, external, pastoral role.<sup>11</sup>

### *A Local Study: The Original Parish Served by St Peter's, Wootton Wawen*

I shall not engage with this debate until the final part of this essay. My primary aim is to demonstrate how we can find out the extents of the large mother-church parishes which are widely held to have been in existence by the late Anglo-Saxon

<sup>10</sup> Cambridge and Rollason, 'Pastoral Organization', pp.90–91, 94–95; Blair, 'Ecclesiastical Organization', pp.208–09.

<sup>11</sup> Blair, 'Introduction', pp.7–9; Cambridge and Rollason, 'Pastoral Organization', pp.97–103; Blair, 'Ecclesiastical Organization', pp.197–98.

period — irrespective of whether they were already very old by then or had only recently been created. This is hardly ever done: the existence of mother-church parishes at this period has usually been viewed as uncontroversial, but they have only rarely been mapped by detailed local studies.<sup>12</sup>

Specifically, I want to explain how we can discover the extent of the original parish of the church of Wootton Wawen (Warwicks.), which is in the west midlands c.25 km south of Birmingham. It is a church with many structural phases, the first of which is of tenth- or early eleventh-century date and includes a central tower.<sup>13</sup> It replaced a church which had been built in the early eighth century, and for which the foundation charter survives in an early eleventh-century hand in a Worcester **cartulary**\*.<sup>14</sup> Issued by the Mercian king Æthelbald between 716 and 737, it speaks of a minster being set up at Wootton and endowed with land, assessed at twenty **hides**\*, which lay within a territory (*regio*) called *Stoppingas*. This now lost name, the equivalent of ones such as Hastings, Reading and Roding, means ‘people of the bucket-shaped hollow’ or ‘Stoppa’s people’, in the sense of ‘the land of the people of the bucket-shaped hollow’ or ‘the land of Stoppa’s people’.<sup>15</sup>

Wootton Wawen’s church is, then, undoubtedly a minster of early foundation. Today its parish covers 3187 ha, which is large by west midland standards (Fig. 6.1); but it is only the residue of what the church served in the late Anglo-Saxon

<sup>12</sup> Examples are D. A. Hinton and C. J. Webster, ‘Excavations at the Church of St Martin, Wareham, 1985–86, and “Minsters” in South-east Dorset’, *Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society*, 109 (1987), 47–54 (pp.50–53); Hase, ‘Church in the Wessex Heartlands’; S. Bassett, *The Origins of the Parishes of the Deerhurst Area* (Deerhurst Lecture 1997, 1998); D. M. Palliser, ‘The “Minster Hypothesis”: A Case Study’, *Early Medieval Europe*, 5 (1996), 207–14 (about Beverley, but regrettably not illustrated with a map).

<sup>13</sup> H. M. Taylor and J. Taylor, *Anglo-Saxon Architecture*, 2 vols (Cambridge, 1965), II, 685–88; E. Fernie, *The Architecture of the Anglo-Saxons* (London, 1983), pp.116, 128, 178; S. Bassett, *The Wootton Wawen Project: Interim Report No. 1* (University of Birmingham, School of History, 1983), pp.2–9; *Interim Report No. 2* (1984), pp.2–6; *Interim Report No. 3* (1985), pp.1–14; *Interim Report No. 4* (1986), pp.1–12; *Interim Report No. 5* (1987), pp.1–8; *Interim Report No. 6* (1988), pp.1–9.

<sup>14</sup> *Cartularium Saxonicum*, ed. W. de G. Birch, 3 vols (London, 1885–93), I, no. 157; P. H. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters: An Annotated Hand List and Bibliography* (London, 1968), no. 94.

<sup>15</sup> M. Gelling, ‘The Place-Name Volumes for Worcestershire and Warwickshire: A New Look’, in *Field and Forest: An Historical Geography of Warwickshire and Worcestershire*, ed. T. R. Slater and P. J. Jarvis (Norwich, 1982), pp.59–78 (p.69).

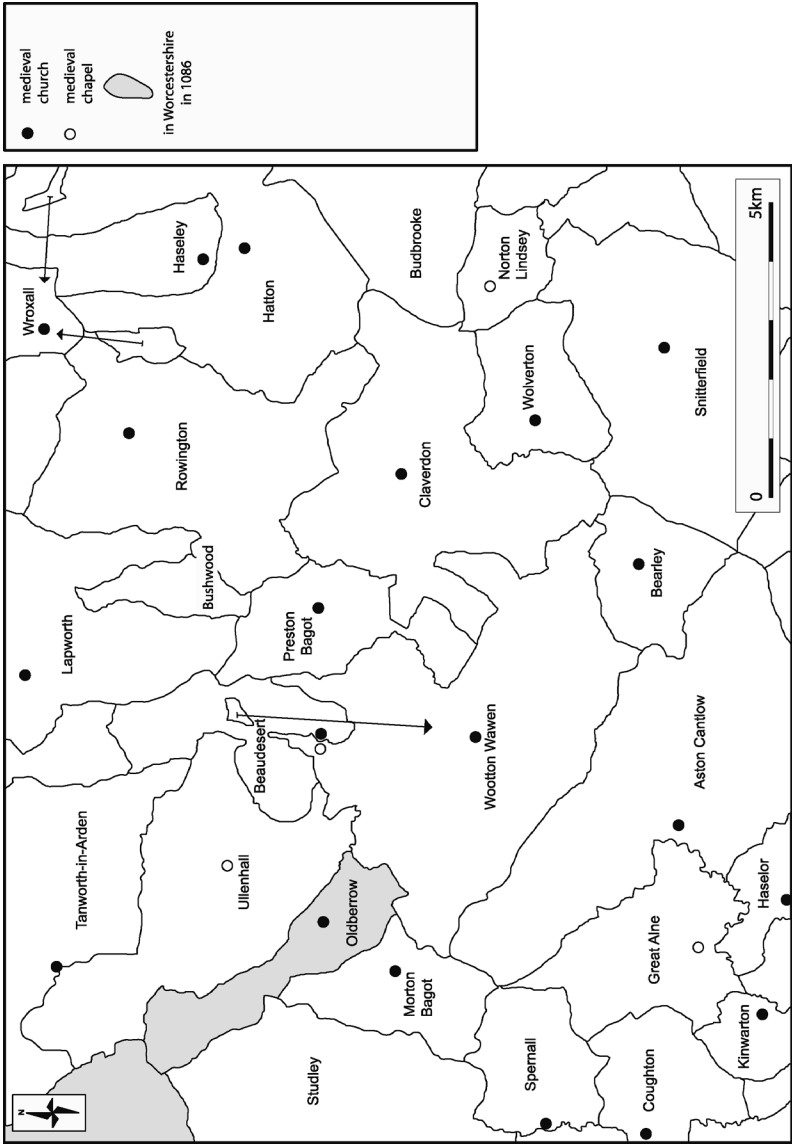


Figure 6.1. Parishes in the vicinity of Wootton Wawen (Warwicks.) at their late eighteenth-/early nineteenth-century extent.

Oldberrow was transferred into Warwickshire in 1896.

Bushwood was a detached part of the parish of Old Stratford (not on the map).

period when its parish arguably covered *c.* 7000 ha (Fig. 6.2).<sup>16</sup> To prove this statement is, however, no easy matter since it involves assembling scraps of evidence from a wide range of sources — mostly from documents, but some from place-names and a few more from maps drawn in the last 250 years. When assembled, this evidence indicates that as many as eleven other churches were once subordinate to Wootton Wawen's church. Most of them sooner or later broke free of its control, and today they serve the other parishes shown on Fig. 6.1.<sup>17</sup> To rephrase this in appropriate medieval terms, Wootton Wawen's church was once the mother-church of the whole area depicted there, and the eleven other churches were at first no more than subordinate chapels which stood in different parts of its originally far larger parish. Ten of the eleven still exist and have much late medieval fabric in them but, unlike Wootton Wawen's church, none has anything Anglo-Saxon.

### Henley-in-Arden

Of these churches the latest to be founded was St John's, Henley-in-Arden. Until 1914 it was subject to the church of Wootton Wawen.<sup>18</sup> Henley is a small, single-street borough created in the twelfth century, or soon after, by being laid out with a regular plan on a greenfield site at the south-eastern corner of the manor of Ullenhall. In 1367 the bishop of Worcester let the burgesses build a chapel dedicated to St John, so long as they acknowledged that they were still subject to Wootton Wawen's church.<sup>19</sup> The latter had successfully petitioned for a chapel of their own for the usual reason — that the journey from where they lived to their mother-church

<sup>16</sup> Respectively, 7875 acres and nearly 17,000 acres in size.

<sup>17</sup> Fig. 6.1 is based on the following maps held at Warwick County Record Office: DR 195/28 (Wootton Wawen: 1736); Z 190/6(U) (Wootton Wawen, Bearley and Beaudesert: 1800); CR 569/278 (Wootton Wawen, incl. Ullenhall and Henley: 1843); QS 75/79 (Morton Bagot: 1807); CR 1094/1 (Morton Bagot: 1821); CR 569/188 (Oldberrow: 1839); CR 569/23 (Beaudesert: 1841); CR 569/192 (Preston Bagot: 1840); CR 569/65 (Claverdon, incl. Langley, and Norton Lindsey: 1841); QS 75/134 (Wolverton: 1826); CR 569/276 (Wolverton: 1849); CR 611/607 (Bearley: *c.* 1775).

<sup>18</sup> VCH, *Warwickshire*, vol. III, ed. P Styles (London, 1945), p.211.

<sup>19</sup> Worcester County Record Office, BA 2648/4 (ii), ref. no. b716.092, fol. 17<sup>r</sup> (printed in W. Dugdale, *Antiquities of Warwickshire*, 2nd edn in 2 vols (London, 1730), II, 806); D. Graham, 'The Foundation Charter of the Chapel of St John the Evangelist at Henley-in-Arden, 1367', *Warwickshire History*, 12 (2003–04), 154–68.

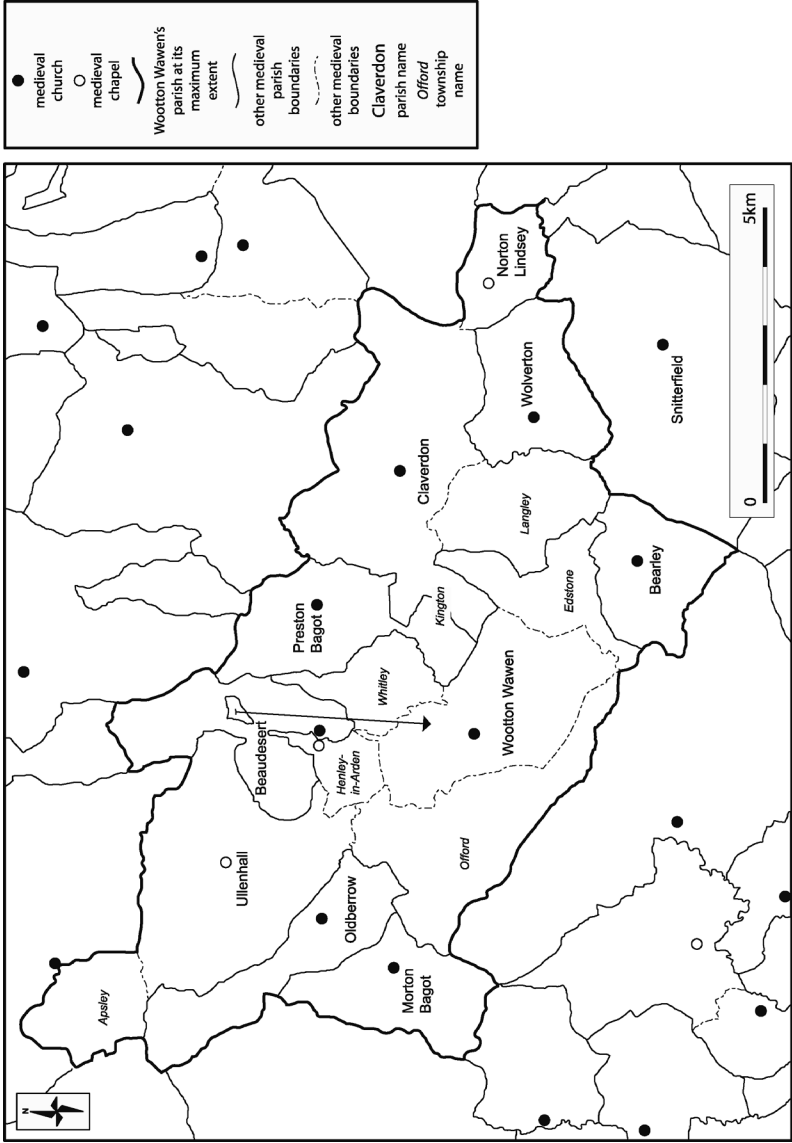


Figure 6.2. Parishes, chapelries, hamlets, and other significant land units in the vicinity of Wootton Wawen (Warwicks.) at their late eighteenth-/early nineteenth-century extent. (The boundary shown between Offord and Wootton Wawen is only approximate.) The probable maximum extent of the parish served by St Peter's Wootton Wawen is also shown.

was too hard to make in winter because of distance and the awful state of the roads. In reality, they were undoubtedly motivated rather more by wanting a measure of ecclesiastical independence, as befitted their burghal status, than by the rigours of the short gentle journey from Henley to Wootton Wawen. Although taking corpses to a mother-church for burial in winter was often a serious problem for the people of outlying parts of a big parish, Henley's church has never had a graveyard. Instead, specific areas of Wootton Wawen's graveyard seem to have been exclusively reserved for the dead of Henley, who were being buried there until 1915.<sup>20</sup> In 1914 St John's at last became independent and was given the area of the borough as its parish; but less than a year later it lost its new-found freedom when the living was combined with that of neighbouring Beaudesert (whose church lies only 200 m to the east, on the opposite bank of the River Alne).<sup>21</sup>

## Ullenhall

Ullenhall had a church by the twelfth century, but the whole area was subject to Wootton Wawen's church for almost as long as Henley-in-Arden was, not becoming an independent parish until 1861.<sup>22</sup> Structural evidence suggests that the church existed by the twelfth century, but it is not recorded until 1586, when an ecclesiastical survey states that it was entitled to have a priest supplied by the vicar of Wootton Wawen at his own cost.<sup>23</sup> The church has a fifteenth-century font, and both the Wootton Wawen registers and the surviving memorials prove that people were being buried there by the seventeenth century.<sup>24</sup> Although it was only a chapel, it may have had the right to baptize and bury throughout the late Middle Ages. It is impossible to say when or how this church originated. Its present, isolated site about 1 km north-east of Ullenhall village is striking. It stands over

<sup>20</sup> I. A. Shorters, *A Wasting Historical Asset? A Comparative Study of Grave Memorials at Wootton Wawen, King's Norton and Birmingham, c. 1700–1940*, British Archaeological Reports, British Series, 366 (Oxford, 2004), p.23.

<sup>21</sup> VCH, *Warwickshire*, III, ed. Styles, pp.48, 211. The area shown as Henley's parish on Fig. 6.2 is that of the township at its 1843 extent; the area of the late medieval borough was almost certainly much smaller.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p.215.

<sup>23</sup> *Minutes and Accounts of the Corporation of Stratford-upon-Avon and Other Records, 1553–1620*, transcribed R. Savage and others, Publications of the Dugdale Society, 10 (London, 1929), IV, 3.

<sup>24</sup> W. Cooper, *Wootton Wawen: Its History and Records* (Leeds, 1936), pp.123–25.



800 m from any other known medieval settlement, being located, however, at an important medieval road junction.

These pieces of evidence all point in one direction. The church at Ullenhall was probably founded by the priests of Wootton Wawen as a parochial chapel — that is to say, founded to provide pastoral care to the population of a substantial part of its mother-church's parish. Many chapels of this sort already existed before 1066 and may often have replaced a preaching cross. They gained a font and a graveyard early on, and in the west midlands at least their main characteristics are the large area which each one served, often containing many Domesday manors, their location on accessible sites in open countryside, and the poor quality of their construction. In Ullenhall's case the evidence of the 1586 survey (that its priest's salary was paid by the vicar of Wootton Wawen) and its inability to break free of its mother-church until the late nineteenth century both reinforce this proposed identification of it as, in origin, a parochial chapel.

## Oldberrow

To the south-west of Ullenhall lies Oldberrow.<sup>25</sup> By 1066 the manor of Oldberrow belonged to Evesham Abbey. It did not lie in Warwickshire with all the rest of Wootton Wawen's original parish but was a detached part of Worcestershire, belonging to the abbey's private hundred of Fishborough.<sup>26</sup> In the late Middle Ages the monks had a charter which alleged that in 709, in return for a pound's measure of purest gold, the Mercian king Coenred had granted land at Oldberrow to Bishop Ecgbine of Worcester for his lifetime, and that after his death it was to pass to the abbey.<sup>27</sup> The charter is a twelfth-century forgery, but it is of real interest because it is accompanied in the cartulary by a boundary clause (in the same hand) which begins, 'These are the bounds of the land at Oldberrow which

<sup>25</sup> Ullenhall's Old English name means 'nook of land of the owl' and Oldberrow's means 'hill of the owl': J. E. B. Gover, A. Mawer and F. M. Stenton, *The Place-Names of Warwickshire*, English Place-Name Society, 13 (Cambridge, 1936), p.245; A. Mawer and F. M. Stenton, *The Place-Names of Worcestershire*, English Place-Name Society, 4 (Cambridge, 1927), pp.267–68; M. Gelling and A. Cole, *The Landscape of Place-Names* (Stamford, 2000), pp.129, 150. (I am grateful to Margaret Gelling for her further comments on these two names, pers. comm., 31 March 2002.) The shared first element of their names does not of itself show that the two areas concerned had once belonged to a single larger territory.

<sup>26</sup> *DB*, fol. 175b; *DB Warwicks.*, 10.4.

<sup>27</sup> *Cartularium Saxonicum*, ed. Birch, I, no. 124; Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, no. 79.

King Beorhtwulf freed and booked to Evesham' (Beorhtwulf having been king of Mercia 840–52).<sup>28</sup> No such privilege is otherwise known about; but, even so, Beorhtwulf's alleged role in the history of Evesham's possession of Oldberrow has the ring of truth. As one of the less well-known kings of Mercia he is unlikely to have been chosen by a twelfth-century scribe who was intent on forging a convincing account of how Evesham gained Oldberrow. This would be true even if no charter of the early eighth-century king Coenred had been forged at the same time. However, it *was* forged then; and so there was nothing to be gained by spuriously attributing anything to Beorhtwulf. I deduce, therefore, that there was an apparently authentic tradition at Evesham that it had held Oldberrow in Beorhtwulf's time, that is, in the mid-ninth century; but whether he had been the original donor or, as is more likely, had merely freed land which Evesham already held from most of its fiscal burdens is unknowable.

Despite Evesham Abbey's apparently long association with the place, Oldberrow's church was required to recognize Wootton Wawen as its mother in the late twelfth century. In c.1150 the bishop of Worcester let the chapel of Oldberrow have a graveyard. But soon a dispute about burial rights arose between Evesham and the Norman abbey of Conches, which had been holding Wootton Wawen's church since the late eleventh century. It was settled in favour of Conches, as a result of which the priest of Oldberrow thereafter had to pay two shillings each year to Wootton Wawen in place of the individual burial fees.<sup>29</sup> This is unimpeachable evidence that Oldberrow lay in its parish.

The chapel itself is an essentially twelfth-century building. Its location next to the manor-house and its close association with the Dispenser family, who were Evesham's tenants at Oldberrow in the twelfth century,<sup>30</sup> together suggest that it was of manorial origin. Never a structure of much architectural distinction, it is

<sup>28</sup> For a suggested solution of the boundary clause, see D. Hooke, *Warwickshire Anglo-Saxon Charter-Bounds* (Woodbridge, 1999), pp.30–36.

<sup>29</sup> Warwicks. Record Office, CRO MI 331, charter 87 (translated in Cooper, *Wootton Wawen*, p.42). The payment was discontinued by a final judgement of c.1186, made at the request of Pope Urban III, which nonetheless fully confirmed the matronal rights of Wootton Wawen's church in Oldberrow: Warwicks. Record Office, CRO MI 331, charter 89. Conches (*alias* St Peter of Castellion) had received the church of Wootton Wawen from its Domesday holder, Robert of Stafford (d. 1088): 'Instrumenta ecclesiae Ebroicensis', no. V, in 'Instrumenta ad tomum xi', in *Gallia Christiana in Provincias Ecclesiasticas Distributa*, vol. XI, ed. P. Piolin (Paris, 1874), cols 128–33 (col. 131: 'ecclesiam de Octona').

<sup>30</sup> VCH, *Warwickshire*, III, ed. Styles, p.140.

still largely in its twelfth-century form. When the chapel was allowed to have a graveyard of its own, Conches recognized a serious threat to its income from Wootton Wawen's church and succeeded in enforcing the right of Oldberrow's mother-church to the payment owed to it whenever any of the manor's population were buried there.

What is especially interesting about this particular case is that Wootton Wawen was entitled to the burial fees of a manor which had, it seems, been in Evesham Abbey's hands since at least the mid-ninth century. In many other cases we find that the burial fees and other dues of manors like Oldberrow did end up being paid to a distant monastic lord such as Evesham. In studies of other areas I have found that it was not unusual for a manor which was granted to a large monastic church elsewhere in the same region to be ecclesiastically 'captured' sooner or later by the latter.<sup>31</sup> This was presumably the result of the manor's real mother-church failing to make a fuss about developments such as those which occurred at Oldberrow in the mid-twelfth century, or perhaps even failing to notice them. However, in Oldberrow's case the mother-church's owner did notice and took swift action — a victory which throws important light on the date of creation of Wootton Wawen's original parish (below, pp.137–39).

### Morton Bagot

Immediately south of Oldberrow lies Morton Bagot. Its church too is next to the site of the former manor-house and also seems to have originated as a manorial chapel. It stands just outside a splendidly preserved **ringwork**\*, which contained the manor-house throughout the late medieval period. The present church's nave still has one round-headed splayed window, and its thirteenth-century chancel arch sits on cushion capitals, which together indicate that the structure was in existence by the twelfth century. Morton Bagot lies west of the watershed separating the valley of the River Alne from that of its western neighbour the Arrow, and so in geographical terms it does not belong to Wootton Wawen's natural hinterland. There can be no doubt, however, that it once belonged to its parish. Early in the fourteenth century there was a dispute about the burial fees which had to be paid whenever an inhabitant of Morton Bagot died. By then its church had been in the hands of Kenilworth Priory for over a century and a half as the result of a grant

<sup>31</sup> S. Bassett, 'Anglo-Saxon Birmingham', *Midland History*, 25 (2000), 1–27 (pp.10–12); S. Bassett, *Anglo-Saxon Coventry and its Churches*, Dugdale Society Occasional Papers, 41 (2001), pp.22–23.

made c.1253x54 by the manor's lord, Peter de Mora.<sup>32</sup> When the dispute arose, Kenilworth said that it had a right to three-quarters of the payment and that only a quarter of it should go to Wootton Wawen. But the latter's right to the full amount was finally upheld by an order in Chancery in 1325x26.<sup>33</sup>

This corroborates what we can safely deduce from the location of Morton Bagot's church next to the site of the manor-house and from Peter de Mora's ability to give it to Kenilworth Priory in the 1250s — that is to say, that it had begun as a manorial chapel in an area which was parochially subject to Wootton Wawen's church. By the early fourteenth century the chapel was largely independent of Wootton Wawen, having its own graveyard by then (as the dispute about burial fees shows). It took Conches far longer to insist on the rights of Wootton Wawen's church at Morton Bagot, but when it did the result was the same as at Oldberrow. Notwithstanding the firm grip that the distant Kenilworth Priory had on Morton Bagot's church and its land, the real mother-church won the dispute and in doing so it provided us with clear evidence that Morton Bagot had once lain in its parish.

## Bearley

The parish of Bearley presents a different situation. In 1220x21 John of Bearley gave Wootton Wawen's church his share in the advowson of Bearley chapel.<sup>34</sup> Superficially, this suggests that until then the chapel had been subject to some other mother-church, but that is not so. More than thirty years before, in 1189, John's father William had given his rights in Bearley's chapel to Bordesley Abbey (near Redditch in Worcestershire), along with a virgate of land. John himself confirmed this gift after his father's death;<sup>35</sup> but he evidently changed his mind, and as a result he dispossessed Bordesley Abbey in 1220x21 and instead gave his rights in it to the priory which Conches had founded in the church at Wootton Wawen. It is hard to be certain what this means, but the best explanation is that Wootton Wawen, or probably Conches, had belatedly but successfully opposed William of Bearley's decision to give away his rights in the chapel. If so, it was presumably on the grounds of its being a chapel which was anciently subject to Wootton Wawen's church.

<sup>32</sup> Dugdale, *Antiquities*, II, 760.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> *Warwickshire Feet of Fines*, vol. I, ed. F. C. Wellstood, Publications of the Dugdale Society, 11 (London, 1935), p.57, no. 294.

<sup>35</sup> Dugdale, *Antiquities*, II, 831.

There were two manors of Bearley in the late twelfth century, one of them held by William of Bearley and the other one being in Bordesley's hands.<sup>36</sup> The chapel itself almost certainly stood on the latter, but it is clear that rights in it were also vested in William's manor. These presumably dated from a time when there was only one manor of Bearley, so that when it had been divided into two at some unknown date before 1066, rights in the chapel had been similarly divided.<sup>37</sup> William's grant of his rights in it to Bordesley Abbey allowed the latter's monks to exercise full control of the chapel and no doubt to get their hands on all its income. Now, if this chapel had been of manorial origin, Conches would arguably have had no grounds for opposing what William had done, and so it is reasonable to deduce that in origin it was a parochial chapel. By the late eleventh century most, perhaps all, of the churches of this sort had become the responsibility of the lords of the manors on which they stood, which explains why confusion could arise at a later date about who exactly had rights in a parochial chapel. Where the mother-church failed to insist on its own original rights, a church such as Bearley's probably was might end up as just another possession of the lord of the manor on which it stood.

This interpretation seems to be corroborated by later evidence. In 1249 John of Bearley's son William gave Bordesley Abbey the next ten years' crops of his **demesne land**\* there, no doubt as compensation for what the abbey had lost in 1220x21.<sup>38</sup> A list of parishes in the diocese of Worcester of 1563 reports that Bearley's church was a chapel of Wootton Wawen. By 1586 it had its own graveyard but paid a fee of 4*d.* for each burial to Wootton Wawen. It was still regarded as Wootton Wawen's chapel in 1786, and it remained a **curacy**\* until in 1929 it was united with Snitterfield, the next parish to the east.<sup>39</sup>

The church's structure unfortunately adds very little evidence to what we have already learnt. Because of several extensive alterations not much datable medieval fabric remains. What there is, especially the north doorway, reveals that a small, unicellular chapel of no special architectural merit existed in the twelfth century, and that all the alterations made to it since then were both piecemeal and unpleasant. That is exactly what I should expect in a chapel of such lowly status.

<sup>36</sup> VCH, *Warwickshire*, III, ed. Styles, p.43.

<sup>37</sup> DB, fols 242b, 243a; DB *Warwicks.*, 22,27; 28,18.

<sup>38</sup> T. Madox, *Formulare Anglicanum* (London, 1702), pp.134–35, no. 227.

<sup>39</sup> London, British Library, MS Harley 595, fol. 212<sup>v</sup>; Dugdale, *Antiquities*, II, 831; J. Bacon, *Liber Regis, vel Thesaurus Rerum Ecclesiasticarum* (London, 1786), p.990; VCH, *Warwickshire*, III, ed. Styles, p.44.

## Claverdon and its Chapels

In discussing Henley-in-Arden, Ullenhall, Oldberrow, Morton Bagot and Bearley I have been dealing with churches for which hard evidence exists of their former subordination to Wootton Wawen's church. I come now, however, to five churches for which there is no direct evidence, but which can nevertheless be shown to have served original parts of its parish, together with a sixth one which probably represents a 'capture' from the parish of an adjacent mother-church. It is likely that in the Anglo-Saxon period Claverdon, not Wootton Wawen, was the most important secular centre in the area once served by the latter's church, and that there was an Anglo-Saxon royal farm in Claverdon — the **king's tūn\*** to which the area's population were required to take the *feorm\**, their annual food render. In the south-western part of Claverdon parish and the adjoining part of Preston Bagot lay the Domesday manor of Kington. Perhaps it was so named because there was a royal residence there, or perhaps it was not first called 'the king's tūn' until it was the only piece of royal land left in the entire area. By 1066, however, it was no longer in the king's hands.<sup>40</sup>

Claverdon's importance even in ecclesiastical matters is shown by its having a church by 1086, and by the fact that the latter had three chapels in the mid-twelfth century. We might expect such a church to have been an original mother-church itself, but there are good reasons for arguing that it had, instead, been set up as yet another parochial chapel of Wootton Wawen's church.<sup>41</sup> In 1151x57 the church of Claverdon was given by Hugh of Hatton to St Florent's Abbey at Saumur in Anjou, together with its three chapels of Langley, Norton Lindsey and Wolverton.<sup>42</sup> This is our first evidence of these chapels' existence. (The earliest datable fabric in the existing churches at Wolverton and Norton Lindsey is thirteenth-century; and the chapel at Langley did not survive the Middle Ages, with not even its site now being known.) Hugh's grant to St Florent's was, it seems, abortive, but there is no need to doubt that it did occur and therefore that

<sup>40</sup> *DB*, fol. 240a; *DB Warwicks.*, 16,19. The evidence showing that part of the Domesday manor of Kington lies in Preston Bagot parish is too lengthy to set out properly here; but in brief the manor was subdivided after 1086, with one part being given to Bordesley Abbey, and with the other part being administered together with the demesne manor of Preston Bagot and consequently being parochially 'captured' by its church. (For 'capture' see below, p.133.)

<sup>41</sup> *DB*, fol. 240a; *DB Warwicks.*, 16,16. The church contains no pre-fifteenth-century fabric.

<sup>42</sup> *Calendar of Documents Preserved in France*, vol. I, ed. J. H. Round (London, 1899), p.412, no. 1146; p.414, no. 1148 (pt).

these three churches did exist in the 1150s and were believed, by some people anyway, to be subject to Claverdon church. We do not know why Hugh's grant was annulled, but a likely explanation must be the intervention of Conches.

A dispute broke out *c.*1208 between Conches and the rector of Claverdon.<sup>43</sup> This concerned the right of the latter's church to take tithes and other ecclesiastical revenue from Langley and Norton Lindsey. (Wolverton was not involved because by then it was already an independent parish church.)<sup>44</sup> Conches claimed that this income belonged by right to their church at Wootton Wawen, and it was able to produce supporting documentation. The dispute dragged on for half a century; but eventually in 1257 the chapels of Langley and Norton Lindsey and their tithes were confirmed to Claverdon church, and the inhabitants were instructed to take their dead to its yard for burial. In return Claverdon agreed to pay Wootton Wawen each year the substantial sum of five marks and eight shillings (£3 14s. 8d.).<sup>45</sup>

To modern eyes this was a triumph for common sense, even if it had taken fifty years of litigation to achieve it. The very length of time needed is eloquent testimony to the complexity of the dispute. At a hearing before papal delegates *c.*1208 the rector of Claverdon had claimed that the ecclesiastical revenues of Langley, Norton Lindsey and the whole of Wolverton had belonged to his church 'by parochial right (*jure parochiali*) for forty years and more'. The prior of Wootton Wawen protested that they had always been paid to *his* church until thirty years ago, and that the people of Langley and Norton Lindsey, and of one of the two Wolverton manors, had always gone to Wootton Wawen for baptism and burial. The different arrangement of the last thirty years, he said, had been agreed with one particular rector of Claverdon for the latter's lifetime alone in return for a yearly payment, and this had been specifically confirmed by the bishop of Worcester. But the rector's successor, after honouring the arrangement for a short while, had then ignored it and begun claiming the tithes and other revenues as Claverdon's by ancient right.<sup>46</sup>

With the benefit of hindsight we can make sense of this ecclesiastical conundrum much more easily than those who were entrusted with solving it in the thirteenth century. The clues we need are all in the records of the dispute. For

<sup>43</sup> Dugdale, *Antiquities*, II, 827.

<sup>44</sup> VCH, *Warwickshire*, III, ed. Styles, p.194, citing (n. 15) Assize Roll 948, m. 6d.

<sup>45</sup> Dugdale, *Antiquities*, II, 827.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

instance, we have the prior of Wootton's admission that the agreement made with a rector of Claverdon for his lifetime alone had in practice survived the latter's death and been carried on by his successor. This must tie in with Claverdon's claim to be entitled to the ecclesiastical revenues of Langley, Norton Lindsey and Wolverton 'by parochial right' — that is to say, by reason of their belonging in its parish, a claim which is fully backed up by Hugh of Hatton's attempt to grant Claverdon's church and its chapels to St Florent's in 1151x57. The arrangement with Wootton Wawen which two successive rectors of Claverdon enjoyed was presumably a formalized version, ratified by the bishop, of an earlier informal arrangement.

Yet the conundrum remains. If the chapels had been built on manors in Claverdon's parish, why was Claverdon not automatically entitled to their ecclesiastical revenues? What possible justification could the prior of Wootton Wawen have had for claiming that they belonged to his church? The answer must be that Claverdon itself had at first been subject to Wootton Wawen's church. If Claverdon's own parish had developed out of a **chapelry**\* of Wootton Wawen, it is small wonder that when manorial chapels were later built on some of the manors which it served on its mother-church's behalf, a conflict of interests should arise between Claverdon and Wootton Wawen. Viewed in this light, the solution adopted in 1257 was eminently reasonable. Recent history, and (if such things were ever taken into account) the best interests of the local people, dictated that the chapels should stay subject to Claverdon; meanwhile the mother-church's ancient right to all the ecclesiastical revenues from its original parish would be satisfied with a large annual payment.

Two loose threads remain. The first concerns the original status of Claverdon's church. The reference in Domesday Book to a priest on the manor indicates its existence by 1086, and the evidence of Hugh of Hatton's gift shows that by 1151x57 it was a parish church serving an area which contained six Domesday manors. These are the attributes of a church with important origins — probably a parochial chapel set up early on to serve roughly the eastern third of Wootton Wawen's original parish.

The other loose thread concerns Norton Lindsey. The suffix Lindsey derives from the Lindsey family, who were holding the manor early in the thirteenth century, when the existing church was built;<sup>47</sup> it was doubtless added to distinguish this Norton from the many other manors of the same name. Originally

<sup>47</sup> Gover, Mawer and Stenton, *Place-Names of Warwickshire*, p.216; VCH, *Warwickshire*, III, ed. Styles, p.138.



Norton Lindsey had been called plain Norton, the ‘north *tūn*’, that is, ‘north farm or manor’. Now it is not hard to work out that by no stretch of the imagination could Norton Lindsey be said to be north of anywhere in Wootton Wawen’s original parish. A manor with a directional name like Norton, Aston, Sutton or Weston was so called in relation to a more important place to which it was subordinate: ‘it is our north farm, our north *tūn*’. To the south of Norton Lindsey is Stratford-upon-Avon, somewhere with a church which, like Wootton Wawen’s, was an Anglo-Saxon mother-church.<sup>48</sup> In brief it is probable that Norton Lindsey was at first served by Stratford’s minster, but that sooner or later it was captured by Wootton Wawen. This occasionally happened when someone held a lot of manors in one district, including the manor on which a mother-church stood and also one or more manors which were subject to other nearby mother-churches. If he gave his own mother-church the tithe from the demesne land on all his manors in the district, and if he was never challenged by the owners of any of the other mother-churches, he would have begun a process which might well end in the ‘capture’ of one or more manors by a church which was not their original mother. I suggest that this explains how a manor called Norton could end up as the easternmost part of the original parish of Wootton Wawen. To put some flesh on these bones, Domesday Book states that in 1066 the manors of Wootton Wawen and Norton Lindsey were both being held by a thegn, Vagn, who also had several other manors in the same area.<sup>49</sup> He, or someone before him who also held both manors, arguably set this ‘capture’ in motion.

### **Preston Bagot and Beaudesert**

Finally, I come to Preston Bagot and Beaudesert, two parishes which mirror a pair of adjacent Domesday manors called Preston. Beaudesert’s name is Norman French, meaning ‘beautiful wilderness’, but the history of its manorial descent proves that it was the second of the two manors called Preston which Domesday

<sup>48</sup> *Cartularium Saxonicum*, ed. Birch, II, no. 450; Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, no. 198 (Beorhtwulf’s charter of 845); *Cartularium Saxonicum*, ed. Birch, II, nos 533–34; Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, no. 1278 (Bishop Wærferth’s lease of 872). The minster is also referred to in a spurious charter of 714: *Cartularium Saxonicum*, ed. Birch, I, no. 130; Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, no. 1250.

<sup>49</sup> *DB*, fol. 242b; *DB Warwicks.*, 22,9; 22,23. Vagn held at least two other manors in the area mapped on Figs 6.1–2: *DB*, fol. 242b; *DB Warwicks.*, 22,6–7.

Book records in Warwickshire.<sup>50</sup> The proximity of these manors and their shared name show that they must originally have formed a single land unit called ‘the priests’ *tūn*’, that is, ‘farm or manor of the priests’.<sup>51</sup> But this does not prove that the area had ever been in Wootton Wawen’s parish: conceivably the priests of Preston’s name could have belonged to some other mother-church. The evidence needed to show that the entire Preston area originally belonged to Wootton Wawen’s parish is slight and circumstantial, but it is nonetheless convincing.

It comes chiefly from the area’s location. Beadesert and Preston Bagot are bordered by land parochially subject to the church of Wootton Wawen (Figs 6.1–2). This occurs to an extent which can leave no reasonable doubt that they too must originally have been subject to it. To the west lies Ullenhall, to the east Claverdon, and to the south Wootton Wawen itself. What is more, the boundary shared by the parishes of Wootton Wawen, Beadesert and Preston Bagot follows a decidedly eccentric line. There is a long, narrow tongue of land which pushes up between the latter two parishes to within less than a kilometre of the northern edge of Preston Bagot. It belonged to the Domesday manor of Whitley, an area which has apparently always been in Wootton Wawen parish, even though in terms of its natural topography Whitley is an integral part of the Preston area.<sup>52</sup> And, so, the fact that Wootton Wawen’s church has always had parochial control of Whitley makes it very likely that the priests of Preston’s name were those of the minster at Wootton Wawen, and, secondly, that the now independent parishes of Beadesert and Preston Bagot originally belonged to its parish.

If that is correct, the two Domesday manors of Preston were presumably formed by a subdivision of the northern part of the land owned by the minster community of Wootton Wawen. When the minster was founded in the early eighth century it was endowed with land assessed at twenty hides, and so it is worth noting that Domesday Book records that in 1086 the two manors named Preston were each assessed at five hides, the manor of Whitley was assessed at three hides, and the manor of Wootton Wawen at seven hides.<sup>53</sup> That is to say, the four manors together had an assessment of exactly twenty hides in 1086. I suggest, then, that their combined area represents what had been given to the

<sup>50</sup> *DB*, fol. 240a, b; *DB Warwicks.*, 16,18; 16, 62; Gover, Mawer and Stenton, *Place-Names of Warwickshire*, p.199; *VCH, Warwickshire*, III, ed. Styles, p.45. Both manors were in Ferncombe Hundred.

<sup>51</sup> Gover, Mawer and Stenton, *Place-Names of Warwickshire*, p.217: *Prestetone*.

<sup>52</sup> *DB*, fol. 242b; *DB Warwicks.*, 22,25; *VCH, Warwickshire*, III, ed. Styles, pp.200–01.

<sup>53</sup> *DB*, fols 240a, 240b, 242b; *DB Warwicks.*, 16,18; 16,62; 22,9; 22,25.

minster at Wootton Wawen at its foundation (Fig. 6.3). We know that by 844 it and its lands were in the hands of the cathedral church at Worcester; and in 1086 the manor of Wootton Wawen belonged to the bishop of Worcester's private hundred of Pathlow, even though by then it was in secular hands.<sup>54</sup> These facts strongly suggest that at some time in or after the ninth century the minster's landed endowment had been split up between the church of Worcester and the minster's own priests, with Worcester holding on to the land which lay closest to the minster, and with the priests being allowed to keep the more distant part, as a result of which the latter became known as 'the priests' *tūn*', Preston.

The churches of Preston Bagot and Beaudesert both include a lot of twelfth-century fabric. The former looks as if it was set up as a parochial chapel, and Beaudesert's has all the characteristics of a manorial one. Preston Bagot's church was built as a simple unicellular chapel with a minimum of architectural or sculptural embellishment, and with much poorer materials and workmanship than are found in any of the nearby churches of manorial origin.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, it sat at a considerable distance from the manor-house of Preston Bagot, located in the most visible place available at the end of a pronounced spur of land, in the middle of a furlong which had been cut out of one of the manor's open fields.<sup>56</sup> These attributes plainly mark it out as a church that was set up, not as an act of private devotion and self-advertisement by a lord of the manor, but as a roofed meeting-place for the local population as a whole; that is to say, it too was a parochial chapel. Almost certainly, the present church was not the first one on the site. Any earlier one set up by the priests of Wootton Wawen was presumably timber-built, and it could not be discovered now without extensive excavation.

The question of when Preston Bagot's church was founded will have to stay unanswered for the time being, but that is certainly not true of St Nicholas's, Beaudesert. It stands at the foot of a minor hill crowned by a ringwork-and-bailey castle which had been built there by the Montforts by 1141.<sup>57</sup> At first the castle

<sup>54</sup> W. Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, ed. J. Caley, H. Ellis and B. Bandinel, 6 vols in 8 (London, 1849), I, 608; *DB*, fol. 242b; *DB Warwicks.*, 22,9. For the origins of Pathlow Hundred, see Bassett, 'Administrative Landscape', pp.160–64.

<sup>55</sup> S. Bassett, *The Wootton Wawen Project: Interim Report No. 7* (University of Birmingham, School of History, 1989), pp.5–12; *Interim Report No. 8* (1991), pp.1–7.

<sup>56</sup> Bassett, *Interim Report No. 7*, pp.12–16.

<sup>57</sup> *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum, 1066–1154*, 4 vols (Oxford, 1913–69), III, ed. H. A. Cronne and R. H. C. Davis, p.220, no. 597; D. Renn, *Norman Castles in Britain*, 2nd edn (London, 1973), p.104.

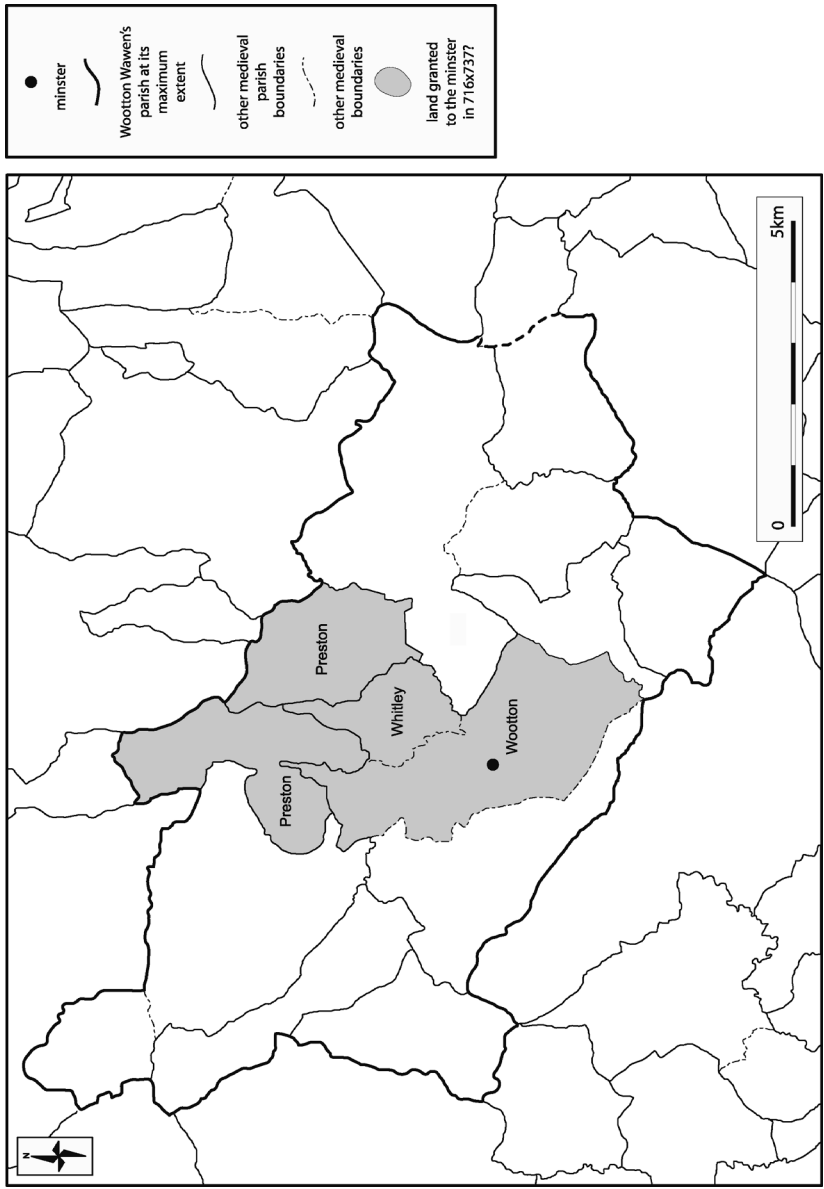


Figure 6.3. The approximate extent of the land granted to the minster at Wootton Wawen at the time of its foundation (716x737). The boundaries shown within this area indicate the likely extents of the four Domesday manors situated there.

probably had a chapel within its earthworks, but in the 1160s a large, finely embellished chapel was built on a far less restricted site just outside the castle's outer defences. It had its own parish by the early fourteenth century,<sup>58</sup> but before it became parochially independent it was probably served by Preston Bagot's church. That is a reasonable deduction from what we know about Beaudesert (i.e. that, as we have seen, it was once called Preston, and that it was carved out of a larger land unit of the same name). The parochial chapel at Preston Bagot is likely to have served the whole of the larger area initially. This deduction is reinforced by what is known about the **glebe land**\* of the two churches, the post-medieval geography of which strongly suggests that it represents a subdivision of what was originally attached to Preston Bagot's church alone.<sup>59</sup>

Of all the arguments made here for a manor's original association with the church of Wootton Wawen the one for Beaudesert, although circumstantially sound, is the least well supported by direct evidence. And so it is important to note that in 1535 it was reported that Beaudesert's church paid an annual pension of two shillings to Wootton Wawen.<sup>60</sup> The reason for the payment is unknown, but it provides a direct link between the two churches of a sort which normally indicates that the payer served an area which had at first been served by the payee.

### *Dating the Creation of the Original Parish*

That, then, is most of the evidence of which I know for the original parish of Wootton Wawen's church. I am fairly sure that nowhere else belonged to it,

<sup>58</sup> *Calendar of the Register of Adam de Orleton Bishop of Worcester 1327–1333*, ed. R. M. Haines, Worcestershire Historical Society, n.s., 10 (London, 1979), p.47, no. 33 (1328); *Nonarum Inquisitiones in Curia Scaccarii temp. Regis Edwardi III* (London, 1807), p.448 (1341). It may already have been parochially independent by 1283, when the first of several references occurs to a 'rector of the church of Henley', which is almost certainly St Nicholas's, Beaudesert: *A Descriptive Catalogue of Ancient Deeds*, 6 vols (London, 1890–1915), III, 82, no. A 4572; *Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1292–1301* (London, 1895), p.282 (1297); *The Register of the Diocese of Worcester during the Vacancy of the See, usually called 'Registrum Sede Vacante'*, ed. J. W. Willis Bund (Oxford, 1897), p.65 (1302).

<sup>59</sup> *Ecclesiastical Terriers of Warwickshire*, vol. II, transcribed and ed. D. M. Barratt, Dugdale Society, 27 (1971), pp.39–42; Warwicks. Record Office, CR 569/23 and CR 569/192 (tithes apportionment and map for, respectively, Beaudesert and Preston Bagot); Bassett, *Interim Report No. 8*, pp.6–8.

<sup>60</sup> *Valor Ecclesiasticus temp. Henr. VIII auctoritate regia institutus*, 6 vols (London, 1810–34), III, 91.

because I have done similar work in all the adjacent areas and have found that the manors and ecclesiastical parishes there belonged to the original territories of other mother-churches.<sup>61</sup> So, finally, a few words are needed about the light that this case study throws on the fiercely debated issue of the date at which minsters of early foundation like Wootton Wawen acquired a parish. Was it indeed not until the late Anglo-Saxon period, at the hands of one of the early rulers of a united kingdom of England, such as Athelstan or Edgar? Or did these minsters have parishes at a much earlier date?

Not one of the subordinate churches discussed above can be shown to have existed before the eleventh century, and most of them may well not have done so. Similarly, in almost every instance the evidence produced here of a now independent parish's former subjection to Wootton Wawen can be comfortably interpreted in terms of a parochial system which had been newly set up in the late Anglo-Saxon period. This is exactly what I have found in the many other studies which I have made of the original extents of mother-church parishes in the west midlands — that in almost every case there is no evidence of mother-daughter relations which cannot have arisen in or after the tenth century. This is hardly surprising given the late date of most of the evidence that has to be used; but there is no room here for special pleading. If the debate about the origins of the parochial system is to be moved on — that is to say, if we are to make significant progress in discovering if the mother-church parishes whose fission produced the parochial geography of late medieval England were ones newly created in or after the tenth century, or if they were of much greater antiquity — then clear signs must be sought of mother-daughter relationships which can have arisen only *before* the tenth century.<sup>62</sup>

Evidence to this effect has already been found in several parts of the west midland region.<sup>63</sup> There seems to be similar evidence for the Wootton Wawen area too. To examine it we need to make a very brief return to Oldberrow, the one part of this whole area which in 1086 was in Worcestershire, not Warwickshire

<sup>61</sup> Bassett, 'Administrative Landscape', pp.160–64.

<sup>62</sup> This presupposes that such relationships were never imposed on pre-existing churches which, prior to the granting of matronal rights and responsibilities to one church within a given district, had been in no way dependent on the latter. I admit to holding this presupposition, believing there to be substantive, though admittedly only circumstantial, arguments in support of my position, which are, however, too lengthy to be set out here.

<sup>63</sup> For example, Bassett, *Origins of the Parishes of the Deerpurth Area*, pp.6–7 (Bishops Cleeve), 8–9, 21–24 (Beckford), and 20; Bassett, 'Anglo-Saxon Birmingham', pp.10–12 (Aston).

(because it was held then by Evesham Abbey). Moreover, it lay in Evesham's small private hundred, Fishborough Hundred, unlike many of the abbey's other manors, including less distant ones.<sup>64</sup> This fact and its eccentric membership of Worcestershire<sup>65</sup> firmly indicate that Oldberrow was already in Evesham's hands at the time of the tenth-century reorganization of secular administration in the former kingdom of Mercia which was undertaken by its new West Saxon rulers. (I argued earlier from Beorhtwulf's alleged privilege that it had probably been Evesham's since at least the mid-ninth century.)

Yet it is certain that Oldberrow was parochially subject to Wootton Wawen's church, and that all Evesham's efforts to undermine this relationship in and after the twelfth century were in vain.<sup>66</sup> This might mean no more than that in the tenth century some bright young West Saxon policy-maker devised a genuinely community-friendly plan for delivering pastoral care to everybody in England — someone who, swimming against the strong tide of monastic vested interests, was determined to ensure that every one of his new mother-church parishes should be geographically coherent, no matter how often it meant treading on the toes of a major church like Evesham. But if so, it is amazing that his grand plan should have been thwarted so often elsewhere in England — as it plainly was, if that is how things really were — and yet should have proved so robust at Oldberrow. A more plausible explanation is that Wootton Wawen's church had already got parochial control of Oldberrow *before* it came into Evesham's hands, which (as we have seen) was probably not later than the 840s. This explanation certainly puts a lot of faith in the reliability of an entry in an Evesham cartulary, which is not normally a wise move. But it is very hard to believe that the abbey's monks would have seen any value in spuriously naming the obscure Beorhtwulf as a benefactor. And so I suggest that what the charter says about him is true, and that we may take it that Oldberrow was already subject to the church of Wootton Wawen by, at the latest, the end of his reign in 852. If it was, this looks like another example of a mother-church which very probably had a parish before the tenth century.

<sup>64</sup> *DB*, fol. 175b; *Domesday Book*, vol. XVI: *Worcestershire*, ed. F. Thorn and C. Thorn (Chichester, 1982), 10,4. Lying between Evesham and Oldberrow are four Evesham Abbey manors which were not in Fishborough Hundred: *ibid.*, 10,13–16.

<sup>65</sup> Evesham Abbey's manors at Abbot's Salford and Weethley lay between it and Oldberrow but were situated in Warwickshire (*DB*, fol. 239a; *DB Warwick.*, 11,3; 11,5), even though they immediately adjoined Worcestershire.

<sup>66</sup> Above, pp.125–27.

## Conclusion

That is by no means a watertight conclusion, and plainly it will not put an end to the fierce debate about when Anglo-Saxon minsters gained parishes. However, it was never my intention to do so here. Instead, I have sought to prove the reality of one particular late Anglo-Saxon mother-church's parish and to chronicle its slow fission.<sup>67</sup> While it is still in our sights, one other aspect of this area is worth considering. Figure 6.4 shows it superimposed on the local drainage pattern. It is immediately clear that the district which Wootton Wawen's church initially served comprised the middle section of the drainage basin of the River Alne, with its north-western boundary mainly coinciding with the watershed between the Alne itself and the River Arrow, and its south-eastern boundary (if Norton Lindsey is excluded) coinciding with the one between the Alne's easternmost tributary and the River Avon. The other two boundaries lie at right-angles to the predominant trend of the Alne and its main tributaries. The area thus enclosed would have contained a cross-section of land-use types, offering the resources needed for a mixed economy based on arable cultivation, stock rearing and the exploitation of woodland.

As an undivided territory it is reminiscent of the early Anglo-Saxon 'river estates' which have been identified elsewhere in lowland Britain.<sup>68</sup> Within it lay the twenty hides of land which Æthelbald 'booked' to the minster at Wootton in 716x37, describing it as 'all this area within the boundaries set up by its ancient possessors, with fields and woods and meadows and everything which can be produced from it for the necessities of life'.<sup>69</sup> This endowment was 'in fact an area

<sup>67</sup> That parish almost certainly had neither the full extent of the area depicted in Fig. 6.2 nor internal secular boundaries which exactly followed the lines of the parish boundaries shown there. Norton Lindsey was probably not an original component of it (above, pp.132–33); similarly, Morton Bagot (which lies in the Arrow valley, not that of the Alne) cannot be ruled out as another possible example of 'capture'. Some of the internal boundaries mapped in the early nineteenth century may represent the end product of a process of internal colonization which was still incomplete in the late Anglo-Saxon period; and blocks of land — often only single fields — are likely to have been transferred from one parish to another for tenurial or other reasons, as happened to the western half of the Domesday manor of Kington (above, note 40), for example.

<sup>68</sup> For example, W. G. Hoskins and H. P. R. Finberg, *Devonshire Studies* (London, 1952), pp.302–05; T. R. Slater, 'More on the Wolds', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 5 (1979), 213–18; A. Everitt, *Continuity and Colonization: The Evolution of Kentish Settlement* (Leicester, 1986), ch. 4.

<sup>69</sup> 'Omnem itaque hunc agrum intra terminos ab antiquis possessoribus constitutos, cum campis et saltibus et pratis necnon et uniuersis qui ex eo provenire possint necessariis reddituum usibus': *Cartularium Saxonicum*, ed. Birch, I, no. 157; Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, no. 94.



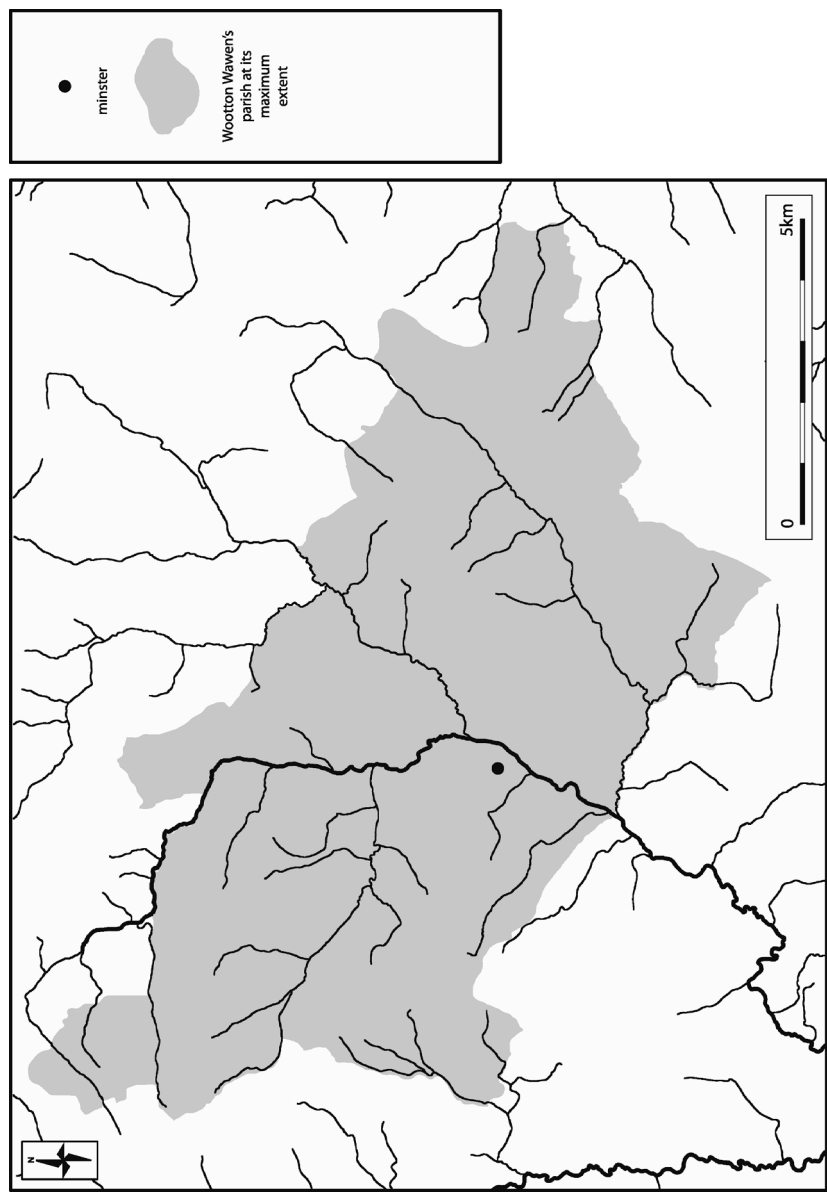


Figure 6.4. The probable maximum extent of Wootton Wawen's parish shown in relation to natural drainage.

which lies in the territory anciently called *Stoppingas*’; and the natural topography of the district within which the minster and its land were situated has a scooped-out appearance which invites identification as the putative ‘bucket-shaped hollow’ (*\*stoppa*) of that name.<sup>70</sup> That is to say, the obvious topographical coherence of the area which, arguably, Wootton Wawen’s church was serving by the mid-ninth century suggests that it became a formal territory, not by the aggregating of a cluster of separate manors for ecclesiastical purposes, but through its being a primary unit of early Anglo-Saxon settlement and land use.

The case study at the heart of this essay has produced a solid, largely secure exemplification of the model for the origins of the parochial system which was set out at the start, and there is no good reason to regard Wootton Wawen as exceptional in any important respect, not even in terms of the quantity or quality of the surviving evidence used in this study. In the west midlands, as elsewhere, a great many of the late Anglo-Saxon mother-churches can be reliably identified; and, where appropriate evidence exists, their original parishes can be wholly or partly mapped and their eventual disintegration tracked.<sup>71</sup> This gives the study of local communities an essential topographical dimension which, amplified by further historical research and, where appropriate, by fieldwork and other archaeological activities, can greatly enhance our understanding of how they functioned, interacted and evolved. This is likely to be as achievable in respect of specific secular communities — members of an English manor, say, or hundred — as of an ecclesiastical one. Mapping medieval land-units is an excellent way of combining and thereby enhancing what we know of the ecclesiastical, socio-economic, and political/administrative organization of the inhabitants of any given area.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>70</sup> ‘Est autem idem ager qui traditur in regione quae antiquitus nominatur STOPPINGAS.’ I am grateful to Margaret Gelling for discussing this name’s etymology and historical significance with me, and for her endorsement of my suggestion that ‘bucket-shaped hollow’ is topographically appropriate for the area in question (pers. comm., 29 July 1998).

<sup>71</sup> See note 11 for published examples.

<sup>72</sup> I am most grateful to Wendy Davies, Julio Escalona, Duncan Probert and Orri Vésteinsson for their comments on an earlier draft of this chapter, and to Donald Graham for advice on the extent of the late medieval manor of Offord.

# MAPPING SCALE CHANGE: HIERARCHIZATION AND FISSION IN CASTILIAN RURAL COMMUNITIES DURING THE TENTH AND ELEVENTH CENTURIES

Julio Escalona

Rural communities, their social life and relationships are prominent in Castile north of the River Duero, where surviving written sources from the period before 1100 begin earlier and are more abundant than those from south of the river. This material makes a suitable point from which to observe medieval communities, and one that bears interesting comparisons with other areas in the Iberian northern fringes, such as Catalonia or Galicia, and elsewhere in Europe, as other essays in this volume make clear. However, the peculiarities of medieval Iberia's historiography loom high over any attempt to compare Castilian communities with their European counterparts. This is true of many other areas — witness, again, most of the essays in this book — but a strong caveat is nevertheless necessary for early medieval Castile, because of the present crisis of a whole historiographical model based upon the repopulation of deserted — or very thinly populated — areas. Since the 1990s new views have emerged, but they are only just beginning to be credited as anything more than marginal in the most general state-of-the-art reviews, and are clearly under-represented in the available Spanish, let alone English, literature. It seems appropriate, therefore, to start with a brief presentation of recent views of Castilian space and communities to help contextualize the material I will discuss later on.

## *The Historical/Historiographical Setting*

### **The Historical Process**

Following the Visigothic collapse in 711, effective Arab control came, by 770, to be restricted to the lands south of the Spanish Central mountains and the

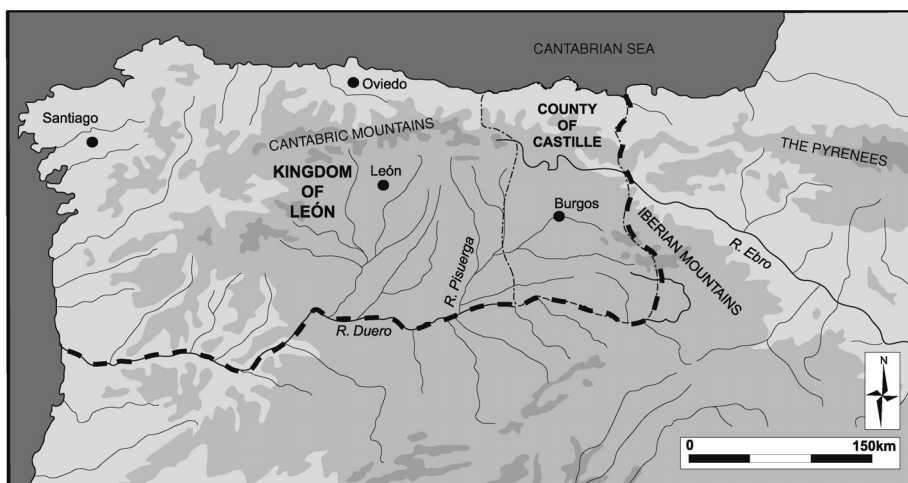


Figure 7.1. North-west Iberia in the tenth-century:  
the Asturian kingdom and the Castilian county.

Pyrenean *piedmont*. Of the northernmost reaches, the east soon became involved in Carolingian expansion. Much less so the west, where a kingship of obscure origin developed in the eighth century in the Asturian uplands, managed to gain a certain stability during the first half of the ninth century, and in the late ninth to early tenth century expanded over the northern half of the Duero basin to become the largest Christian polity in Iberia. Meanwhile the territories between the Duero and the Cantabrian mountains lay beyond the control either of the Cordoban **emirs**\* or the kings of Oviedo (Fig. 7.1). Late ninth-century chroniclers seeking to legitimize the Asturian take over argued that these lands had remained depopulated after 711. This idea was to influence interpretations of medieval Spain up to the mid-twentieth century.<sup>1</sup>

The eastern side of the kingdom of Oviedo-León was the county of Castile. Originally a small territory just south of the Cantabrian mountains, Castile retained its name through a process of expansion southwards that repeated, a generation later, that which had taken place on the western side of the plateau. By 930, Castile comprised the lands from the Cantabrian sea to the River Duero, between the River Pisuerga and the Iberian Mountains that divide the plateau

<sup>1</sup> J. Escalona, 'Family Memories: Inventing Alfonso I of Asturias', in *Building Legitimacy: Political Discourses and Forms of Legitimation in Medieval Societies*, ed. I. Alfonso, H. Kennedy and J. Escalona (Leiden, 2004), pp.223–62.

from the central Ebro valley (Fig. 7.1). This is the territory to which I will refer as Castile in this text. From 931 to 1027, it was ruled by the Castilian comital dynasty under the sway of the Leonese kings, and in certain periods it enjoyed a remarkable degree of autonomy.

### Historiography: From Vacuum to Continuity

Faced with the difficulty of accounting for the Duero basin's ill-documented history between 711 and the Asturian-Leonese takeover, modern historians have relied on explanations largely cast in the mould of the ninth-century royal chronicles. This was taken to its most sophisticated form by Sánchez-Albornoz, establishing a dominant orthodoxy for most of the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> According to him, the Duero plateau had been deliberately devastated in the eighth century by King Alfonso I to create a defensive no-man's-land between his kingdom and Al-Andalus, and was gradually occupied by the Asturian repopulation in the following centuries. On this allegedly empirical basis Sánchez-Albornoz defined the Asturian kingship's ultimate historical mission: to preserve the Visigothic institutional inheritance and pass it on to a social body and territory whose links with the Roman and late antique past had been abruptly cut out and replaced with a new society of freemen; the influence of Turner's *American Frontier* on Sánchez-Albornoz has long been recognized.<sup>3</sup> The thin archaeological evidence and the fact that the region's post-Visigothic texts start with its new Asturian masters — mainly great monasteries — helped the depopulationist theory become almost untouchable. All fresh evidence thereafter was used in circular arguments, interpreted in the light of this uncontested orthodoxy, and then used to reinforce it.<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps surprisingly, given the great theoretical importance attached to it, settlement itself was little investigated until the 1960s. Historians were more concerned with legal history and the Visigothic origins of the Asturian institutions; post-Visigothic medieval archaeology was practically non-existent. Then in the 1960s a new breed of studies tried to map the milestones of Christian 'repopulation'

<sup>2</sup> C. Sánchez-Albornoz, *Despoblación y Repoblación del Valle del Duero* (Buenos Aires, 1966).

<sup>3</sup> On Sánchez-Albornoz's legacy, see R. Pastor, C. Estepa, J. A. Garica de Cortázar, J. L. Abellán and J. L. Martín, *Sánchez Albornoz a debate* (Valladolid, 1993).

<sup>4</sup> F. Reyes and M. L. Menéndez Robles, 'Aspectos ideológicos en la despoblación del Valle del Duero', in *Historiografía de la Arqueología y de la Historia Antigua en España (siglos XVIII–XX)* (Madrid, 1991), pp.203–07.



Photo 7.1. The Liébana valley, Cantabria.

southwards,<sup>5</sup> mostly dots on maps of the struggles between Christian and Muslim. It was only in the 1970s and 1980s that settlement patterns became the subject of high-quality research, mainly based on written and place-name evidence.<sup>6</sup>

By 1990, most scholars would agree upon a threefold scheme of Castilian-Leonese settlement: 1) In the northern mountainous lands — neither controlled by the Arabs nor depopulated by the Asturian kings — the dominant pattern was that of ‘valley communities’. Those were substantial upland territories occupied by scatters of farm-type dispersed settlements, with churches as territorial foci, and a network of social ties across the valley, mostly based upon common management of, and access to, uncultivated land and other resources (pasture, wood,

<sup>5</sup> S. de Moxó, *Repoblación y Sociedad en la España cristiana medieval* (Madrid, 1979).

<sup>6</sup> Especially J. A. García de Cortázar, ed., *Organización social del espacio en la España Medieval: La Corona de Castilla en los siglos VIII al XV* (Barcelona, 1985); J. A. García de Cortázar, ‘Organización social del espacio burgalés en la Alta Edad Media’, in *II Jornadas Burgalesas de Historia: Burgos en la Alta Edad Media* (Burgos, 1991), pp.19–74; P. Martínez Sopena, *La Tierra de Campos Occidental: Poblamiento, poder y comunidad del siglo X al XIII* (Valladolid, 1985).

water and so on). During the central Middle Ages, individual villages — nucleated or not — were defined within most of those valley units, but the larger territories stayed the main framework for much of social life.<sup>7</sup> 2) On the plateau north of the Duero — the limit of tenth-century Christian expansion — the settlement pattern was dominated by a spread of ‘village communities’ of local scale and peer rank, with neither hierarchies nor any higher articulation amongst them. In the 1980s these were mostly seen as the result of spontaneous peasant colonization of deserted spaces. Yet it is the process by which local communities were controlled thereafter by a landed, mainly ecclesiastical aristocracy that is most clearly evidenced in tenth- to eleventh-century charters. Subsequently, in the second half of the eleventh century, the articulation of the **parish**\* network confirmed those village communities as the dominant element in the central Castilian lands. 3) Finally, in the lands between the river Duero and the Central mountains, which were added to the Leonese kingdom in the second half of the eleventh century, the pattern was based on central places of varying rank — from cities with an episcopal see to very small towns — each with a hinterland containing a number of dependent settlements (*aldeas*).

As a result, north and south territoriality was conceived in two levels: local settlements embedded in larger territories, whether ‘valley communities’ or townships (with central places in the south, without them in the north), but in central Castile lay a ‘flat’ mass of peer local settlements, which certainly has a bearing on the degree of social complexity that can be postulated for it. Moreover, links with the late antique regional past remained hazy: in the north, there was continuity, but from a number of allegedly ill-Romanized, largely indigenous societies (‘tribal structures’ was a fashion of the time). In both the middle and the south, due to a more or less prolonged period of desertion, traces of earlier settlement were either lost or negligible, and overlaid with the new ones. Finally, the bulk of peer rural settlements in the plateau north of the Duero were seen as resulting from spontaneous peasant colonization, followed by the establishing of a network of administrative districts by higher political powers, and the emergence of towns and large seigneurial dominions. South of the river, and much later, the kings were

<sup>7</sup> C. Díez Herrera, *La formación de la sociedad feudal en Cantabria* (Santander, 1990); I. Martín Viso, ‘Poblamiento y sociedad en la transición al feudalismo en Castilla: Castros y aldeas en la Lora burgalesa’, *Studia Historica: Historia Medieval*, 3 (1995), 3–45; J. M. Imízcoz, ‘Comunidad de valle y feudalismo en el norte de la península: Algunas preguntas desde el Valle de Baztán’, in *Señorío y feudalismo en la Península Ibérica (siglos XII–XIX)*, ed. E. Sarasa Sánchez and E. Serrano Martín, 4 vols (Zaragoza, 1993), III, 69–86.

supposed to have created from scratch an articulate network of townships and their hinterlands to which the basic rural settlements were ascribed.<sup>8</sup>

## New Perspectives

Although still favoured by many, the threefold pattern of the 1980s nowadays arouses much less vigorous enthusiasm. Since the mid-1990s, new research has called for the consideration of long-term dynamic continuity, as well as greater social complexity.<sup>9</sup> The new views owe much to the growing wave of criticism, from the late 1970s, of the textual evidence upon which the depopulation-repopulation model was based and the dangers of taking its discourse at face value.<sup>10</sup> Closer investigation of the earliest recorded territorial districts (the so-called *alfores*\*) has also played an important role.<sup>11</sup> Much less so archaeology — admittedly the main potential source of fresh evidence — through a lack of tightly-focussed large-scale excavations, although it should take the lead in the near future.<sup>12</sup>

Thin as it is, the available evidence can be used to produce an image of early medieval settlement patterns in central Castile that is rather different from the standard model of the 1980s. My aim will be to suggest that early Castilian local communities were not just scattered peer settlements, but belonged to a more complex territorial pattern, with settlements of different rank and a network of supralocal territories which largely influenced the formation of the earliest-recorded administrative districts. Moreover, in the period I will consider (the tenth and

<sup>8</sup> Compare Astill, this volume.

<sup>9</sup> J. Escalona, *Sociedad y territorio en la Alta Edad Media Castellana: La formación del alfoz de Lara*, British Archaeological Reports, International Series, 1079 (Oxford, 2002); I. Martín Viso, *Poblamiento y estructuras sociales en el norte de la Península Ibérica: siglos VI–XIII* (Salamanca, 2000); I. Martín Viso, *Fragments del Leviatán: La articulación política del espacio zamorano en la alta edad media* (Zamora, 2002), among others.

<sup>10</sup> A. Barbero and M. Vigil, *La formación del feudalismo en la Península Ibérica* (Barcelona, 1978).

<sup>11</sup> C. Estepa Díez, 'El alfoz castellano en los siglos IX al XII', *En la España Medieval, IV: Estudios Dedicados al Profesor D. Ángel Ferrer Núñez*, 2 vols (Madrid, 1984), II, 305–42; I. Álvarez Borge, *Monarquía feudal y organización territorial: Alfores y merindades en Castilla (siglos X–XIV)* (Madrid, 1993).

<sup>12</sup> The dominant picture of the 1980s, considerably more complex and nuanced than its predecessors, contained very little input from medieval archaeology, which, despite its rapid development early in the decade, hardly entered historians' discourse — nor academic posts.



eleventh centuries) the whole pattern was subject to dramatic changes, of which the most remarkable was the fission of village territories, fully comparable to Steven Bassett's discussion, in this volume, of the evidence of Anglo-Saxon parishes.

I will revisit here some cases I have discussed elsewhere together with other freshly assessed material, combining charters with place-names, topography, architecture and, when available, archaeological survey data.<sup>13</sup>

### *Village Fission: A Topographical Exploration*

The Castilian medieval parish network crystallized in the late eleventh century, and most of it has survived up to the present. In south-eastern Castile one parish normally corresponds to one village, many of which can be traced back to the tenth century. At first sight this would suggest that medieval parishes drew directly on a settlement pattern in which village territories were the principal building blocks. However, closer inspection reveals that the late eleventh-century pattern results from the fission of larger, **supralocal units**\* into their component settlements. This process was already on its way when our first charters were written down,<sup>14</sup> so, instead of revealing a starting point, what the textual evidence shows is in fact glimpses of ongoing changes. Moreover, fission worked unevenly, at different paces and in varying intensity in different areas. The territories of Ausín and Orbaneja serve to illustrate this variability.

### **Village Fission in the District of Ausín**

In the tenth and eleventh centuries, Ausín was a small *alfoz* some 15 km south-east of Burgos, formed by a stretch of river with other secondary valleys (Fig. 7.2). Charter evidence is available from the 940s. This must be combined with the study of place-names, topography and the extant architecture. Despite the potentially rich archaeological remains, no excavation has been undertaken hitherto, only non-systematic field surveys, focussed on the pre-Roman and Roman

<sup>13</sup> Vésteinsson's and Bassett's opening discussions in this volume are generally pertinent here, especially regarding handling of place-name evidence.

<sup>14</sup> Charter writing was itself a chief factor of the process. See J. Escalona, 'De "señores y campesinos" a "poderes feudales y comunidades": Elementos para definir la articulación entre territorio y clases sociales en la Alta Edad Media castellana', in *Comunidades locales y poderes feudales en la Edad Media*, coord. I. Álvarez Borge (Logroño, 2001), pp.117–55.

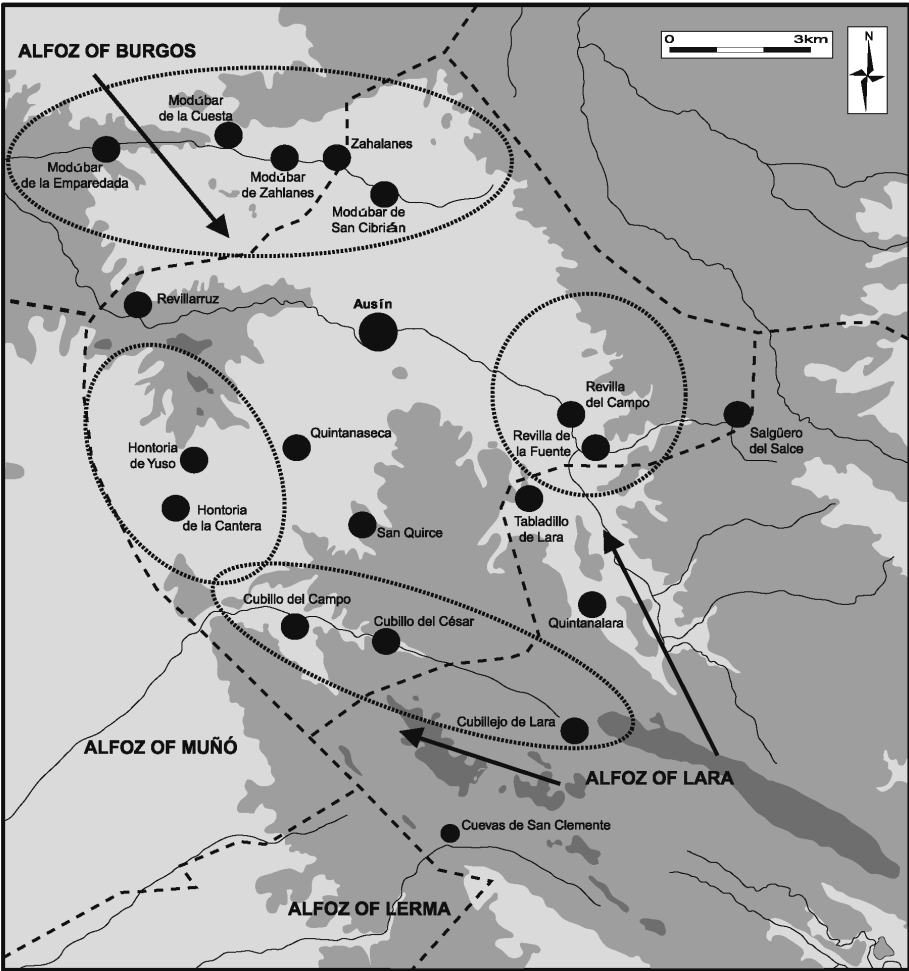


Figure 7.2. The district of Ausín in the tenth to eleventh centuries.  
(Arrows indicate intrusions of neighbouring districts into Ausín's.  
Village-fission cases are grouped by dashed lines.)

periods.<sup>15</sup> Around the central place, Ausín, there lay four smaller territories, largely defined by the drainage network: Modúbar, Hontoria, Revilla and Cubillo. By the

<sup>15</sup> For a discussion of the evidence for medieval Ausín, see Escalona, *Sociedad y territorio*, pp.94–110.

end of the eleventh century, all four had split into two or more village territories. This process can be investigated through place-names and landholding patterns.

Place-name evidence is quite consistent. In all four units, the individual settlements had twofold names. The first element was the same for each area, and villages were singled out by adding a second term connected by the preposition 'de'.<sup>16</sup> Thus, in the small valley of Modúbar, north of Ausín, there lay Modúbar de San Cebrián, Modúbar de Zahalanes, Modúbar de la Cuesta and Modúbar de la Emparedada. Likewise, in the south-western side of the district, the settlements along the watercourse were Cubillo del Campo, Cubillo del César, and Cubillejo de Lara. Just east of Ausín the same phenomenon reappears: Revilla del Campo and Revilla de la Fuente. And, again, south-west of Ausín, there were Hontoria de Suso and Hontoria de Yuso (Fig. 7.2).

Charter references suggest that the larger areas were originally the basic territorial framework within which village territories defined themselves. In the tenth century most charter references to the Modúbar area merely cite 'in Motua'. A church of San Cebrián is mentioned in 944, 963 and 964, but it is not until 1060 that we first see the village called 'Mutuba de Sancti Cipriani'. This does not mean that village territories did not exist before; a more eloquent text of 978 reads: 'in loco que dicitur Motua in villa de Zafalanes territorio fundate concedimus terras, vineas, mulinos', meaning that we are giving arable, vineyards and mills in the deserted village of Modúbar de Zahalanes, near Modúbar de San Cebrián. It rather seems that there were two territorial layers, and more often than not the supralocal one was seen as fit for mention in charters. The process of individualization, though, was uneven. Revilla del Campo is recorded in 1011 with its present name. So are Modúbar de San Cebrián in 1060, and Modúbar de Zahalanes in 1077. By contrast, in the Cubillo valley, villages are first singled out by a personal name ('Cubillo de Sesnando' and 'Cubillo de Don Cipriano') before they reach their final form, sometime before the late twelfth century.<sup>17</sup>

The analysis of land transfers allows for a more dynamic approach. Landholdings in tenth-century Castile were typically fragmented. Large, unitary estates were extremely rare; more normally an individual owned a set of small, dispersed units. If those pieces were scattered across a supralocal territory, it is conceivable that individual estates would extend over village boundaries. This is shown quite

<sup>16</sup> Compare Bassett, this volume.

<sup>17</sup> *Burgos*, no. 34 (1077): 'in Cupiello de Sesnando, illa uestra portione; et in Cupiello Domini Cipriani, illa uestra portione'. In 1053 another text cites 'Cupiello de Nofar' which may or may not be one of the aforesaid (*Burgos*, no. 17).

consistently in land transactions. While the aforementioned 978 charter mentions land in the village territory of Zahalanes within the *locus* called Modúbar, the properties exchanged are more often located by mere reference to the larger territory (1011: 'in Mutua nostram porcionem', and likewise in 1029, 1039 and 1044; also Hontoria in 1029).<sup>18</sup> Alternatively, the existence of more than one homonymous settlement begins to appear in texts from 1011, sometimes with **formulae**\* like 'in Fonteaura nostram porcionem et in alia Fonteaura nostram porcionem' (our share in Fonteaura and our share in the other Fonteaura) (1029) or 'in Cupiello et in alio Cupiello' (in Cupiello and in the other Cupiello); others with generic mentions in the plural: 'in duos Cupiellos' (in the two Cupiellos), 'in ambas Fonte Aureas' (in both Fonte Aureas), 'in ambos Cupiellos' (in both Cupiellos).<sup>19</sup> From the mid-eleventh century, it is increasingly common to see settlements mentioned individually (1060: 'in Mutuba de Sancti Cipriani, meas casas'), but references in the plural persist (1194: 'quantum habemus in Ribiella de Campo et in ambas Fontorias'; 1225: 'en las Fontorias [...] en las Muduvás'; 1246: 'quanto nos perteneçe en ambas las Fontorias') suggesting that landholdings formed a continuum throughout the old supralocal units, regardless of village boundaries.<sup>20</sup>

The topography confirms this impression. In all four units, the basic layout of watersheds and drainage provide self-evident boundaries that correspond to those of the supralocal territories. The dominating axial streams favour a land-use sequence in bands (wet riversides, arable in the valley flatlands, pasture and vineyards in the slopes) flowing continuously along the valley. Village boundaries cut across this landscape, defining valley segments whose territoriality is much less obvious than that of the larger units. Moreover, in at least two cases (Modúbar and Cubillo) the supralocal unit and its main watercourse were homonymous.

<sup>18</sup> *Cartulario de San Juan de la Peña*, ed. A. Ubieto Arteta (Valencia, 1962), no. 49 (1029): 'in Fonteaura de Agusyn meam portionem'. This being a substantial bequest of property over a very wide area, the added term 'de Ausín' is meant here to differentiate Ausín's Hontoria area from other Hontorias in the southern Castilian region (the name is not that unusual).

<sup>19</sup> Compare the cases of plural place-names in S. R. Bassett, 'Continuity and Fission in the Anglo-Saxon Landscape: The Origins of the Rodings (Essex)', *Landscape Archaeology*, 19 (1997), 25–42, and Vésteinsson this volume.

<sup>20</sup> As late as 1352 both Hontorias are recorded as separate villages, but they have exactly the same seigneurial structure, and a rather complex one, with many noble persons sharing rights in them. The same pattern seems to have applied to the Revilla area, but in this case one of the settlements was transferred to ecclesiastical lordship, and this originated diverging seigneurial models for both of them (*Libro Becerro de las Behetrías*, ed. G. Martínez Díez (León, 1981), xi, 61, 62, 107, 108).



Photo 7.2. Ausín.

The paucity of archaeological evidence makes it hard to explore the chronological depth of this model for all units, except Hontoria. This corresponds to the gentle little valley of the River Saelices. Here valley and territory do not have the same name. Hontoria derives from the Latin *Fons Aurea*, admittedly denoting a water-related sacred place, while Saelices comes from San Félix (see below). As we have seen, some charters sometimes merely mention ‘Hontoria’ and others ‘the Hontorias’ or ‘both Hontorias’, but finally they come to distinguish two settlements: Hontoria de Suso and Hontoria de Yuso (meaning Upper and Lower Hontoria, respectively), although joint mentions of both villages keep appearing eventually.

This picture can be combined with other evidence, such as religious architecture. In Hontoria de Yuso a charter of 1056<sup>21</sup> mentions a lost church, which is consistent with its typically early dedication to Santa Eugenia. Further up the

<sup>21</sup> *Cartulario de San Pedro de Arlanza (antiguo monasterio benedictino)*, ed. L. Serrano (Madrid, 1925), no. 56 (1056). The early date surely makes the case for a building in the pre-Romanesque tradition.

valley Hontoria de la Cantera's church is placed on a mound overlooking the modern village and the whole valley. Again, it bears a typically early medieval dedication (St Michael), but the church was rebuilt in the Renaissance, leaving no trace of earlier structures.

However, there is yet a third church in the area, on a discrete elevation amidst the valley lowlands between both Hontorias, closer to the upper settlement. Only a mid- or late twelfth-century Romanesque apse remains of a building that once lay over a substantial Roman site. The nave's walls were torn down in the first half of the twentieth century to retrieve an ensemble of first-century funerary slabs of great size, after which the nave virtually disappeared.<sup>22</sup> While the slabs bear witness to a substantial early Roman settlement, pottery finds from all around the area clearly indicate occupation in the late empire. The evidence is not enough to reveal what type of site there was there — a *villa*\*-building and a nucleated village are equally plausible — or to date its final occupation more accurately. But in the absence of a more defined archaeological context, we can sort the available evidence into a rough stratigraphic order.

The Hontoria area seems to have contained a substantial settlement in Roman times, then developed into a single territory. The name *Fons Aurea* may well date back to that period, and eventually have come to designate the whole valley. In the post-Roman period this site, whatever its character, remained the main local focus and was eventually marked with a church dedicated to St Felix, which gave its name to the River Saelices but not to the individual settlements ([*ecclesia*] *Sancti Felicis* > San Felices > Saelices).<sup>23</sup> At an unspecified period, secondary settlements developed up and down the valley, both with churches with potentially early medieval dedications. Moreover, San Miguel's topographical setting and the reference to Santa Eugenia in a charter of 1056 both suggest pre-Romanesque buildings, although we cannot be precise about how old they were in the eleventh century, when the fission process begins to be expressed in our documents.

The Hontoria case sheds some light on the rest of the Ausín area. Supralocal units seem to have preceded individual villages and were more relevant than the latter to the pattern of territorial organization. *Fons Aurea* may well have been the name of the Roman site (and perhaps of the whole valley); the name lived on long enough to be passed on to the medieval villages; the axial stream may well have

<sup>22</sup> J. A. Abásolo Álvarez, *Epigrafía romana de la región de Lara de los Infantes* (Burgos, no. 1974), pp.35–39.

<sup>23</sup> On this particular place-name, see R. Menéndez Pidal, *En torno a la lengua vasca* (Buenos Aires, 1962), pp.67–71, but see A. Porlan, *Los nombres de Europa* (Madrid, 1998), pp.577–88.

shared that name, but this was later replaced by that of the church which gave continuity to the erstwhile dominant focus in the valley. The Roman site in Hontoria de la Cantera/San Félix, together with the less significant Roman finds in Revilla del Campo<sup>24</sup> could also indicate that sometimes — but not always — one village may have been central to the area before fission took place. (There are hints that Modúbar de San Cebrián dominated the whole Modúbar unit, but the Cubillo valley looks like an undifferentiated linear arrangement.)

However that may be, in the tenth and eleventh centuries the supralocal units in the Ausín area were giving way to village territories. As in some of the Icelandic farms discussed by Orri Vésteinsson and Birna Lárusdóttir in their respective essays, traces of the larger unit survive in the form of a place-name that is shared among several settlements. These traces can also be found in the landscape, in land use and in landholding and seigneurial patterns. But people lived in villages, which ultimately became the basic units for secular and ecclesiastical administration. As far as government was concerned, people belonged to two territorial layers: the *alföz* (district) of Ausín and their respective villages. The mechanisms of social and political integration beyond these levels remain a matter for future research. As for the smaller territories, perhaps the supralocal units faded out very quickly and silently, or perhaps we just lack the evidence to assess their persistence. In this respect, the case of Orbaneja provides an interesting counterpart to Ausín.

### Orbaneja: The Villas and the Valley

From 942, the **cartulary**\* of San Pedro de Cardena — an important monastery about 9 km south-east of Burgos — shows the house gaining property in a nearby area called Orbaneja. This corresponds to the upper half of the valley of the River Picos up to the ridge known as Sierra de Atapuerca (Fig. 7.3). Just as Modúbar or Hontoria were parts of the district of Ausín, Orbaneja belonged to the district of Burgos, which, being a much more important unit, was much more likely to embed smaller territories within its own (see below).

Place-names here clearly do not fit the Ausín model. The name Orbanelia > Orbaneja could just as well derive from a personal name \*Urbanus<sup>25</sup> as from an

<sup>24</sup> Escalona, *Sociedad y territorio*, pp.96–97.

<sup>25</sup> Gregory of Tours (*Historiae*, X.31) mentions a church in *Orbaniacum* > Orbigny, the kind of *-iacum* place-name that Halsall discusses in this volume.

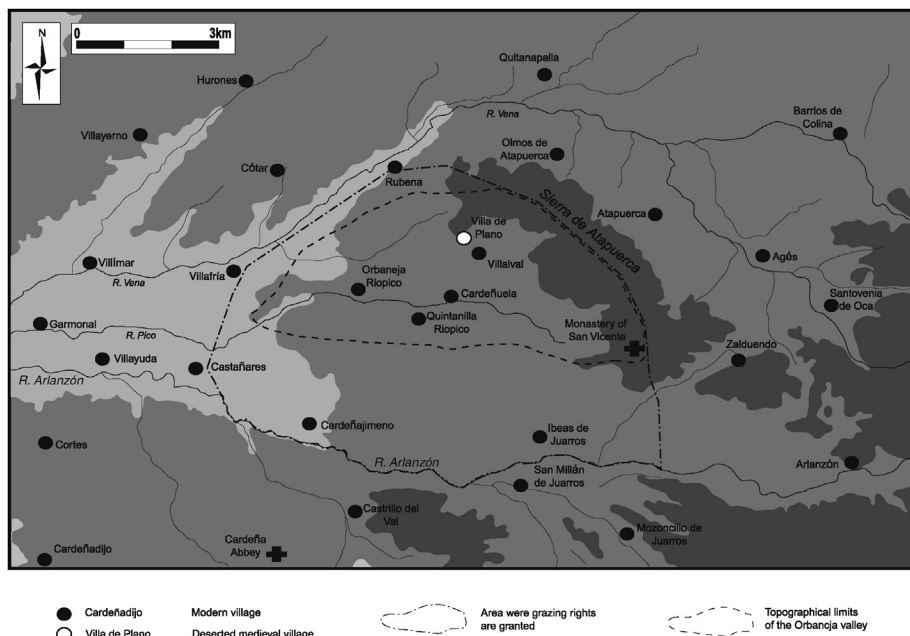


Figure 7.3. The Orbaneja valley in the tenth to eleventh centuries.

obscure \*Orbana, perhaps of pre-Roman origin.<sup>26</sup> Whatever its origin, the area's name was not shared by its main watercourse, the River Picos. Neither did the individual settlements within it take the area's name. In 1073 they were called Orbaneja de Picos, Villa de Valle, Villa de Plano, Villa de Domna Eilo and Cardenuela. The term *villa* is standard medieval Castilian for 'rural settlement', so this aspect is that which is most emphasized in Orbaneja. 'Cardenuela' must be a development that belongs later than the beginnings of Cardena abbey's influence in the area. As for Orbaneja de Picos, it fits a less usual pattern: area name + *de* + river name. This obviously makes sense only if the area and the river do not have the same name and if this Orbaneja is — and, as it happens, it is — the only settlement in the area with this name. The system could be argued to be distinguishing itself from other places called Orbaneja elsewhere in the Burgos hinterland so, again, it could be a relatively late feature, largely imposed from the outside. I would suggest that Orbaneja de Picos could originally have been

<sup>26</sup> In medieval Castile, cf. Orbaneja del Castillo, a deserted Orbaneja, in the *alfoz* of Muñó (G. Martínez Díez, *Pueblos y alfozes burgaleses de la repoblación* (Valladolid, 1987), p.309), as well as the monastery of San Juan de Orbañanos (Orbanianos).



‘Orbaneja’ proper, as the main settlement of a homonymous area in which other settlements (*villae*) existed. Unfortunately, we lack the necessary archaeological evidence here to take the argument further.<sup>27</sup>

In tenth-century land transfers, properties are referred to the supralocal unit: land ‘in the place called Orbaneja’ (*in locum quod vocitant Orbanelia*) (942); a vineyard and a piece of land ‘in the Orbaneja valley’ (*in valle de Orbanelia*) (964 and 969); properties ‘in the surroundings of Orbaneja’ (*in aditos de Orbanelia*) (953 and 984).<sup>28</sup> The only extant eleventh-century transaction introduces the village level: land ‘in the Orbaneja valley, in the place called Cardenuela’ (*in Valle de Orbanelia, in locum quem vocitant Cardeniola*).<sup>29</sup> This is consistent with the Ausín pattern, although here the supralocal level is better illustrated in earlier texts, while the later evidence is scanty.

Grazing rights in the Orbaneja area yield a richer picture of supralocal territoriality. In 963 Cardena was granted the full *villa* of Orbaneja de Picos,<sup>30</sup> in the *suburbium*\* of Burgos;<sup>31</sup> the charter then goes on to award the monastery grazing rights in a substantial area, limited by the River Arlanzón and the neighbouring villages of Castañares, Villafria, and Rubena, up to the Atapuerca ridge (Fig. 7.3). This means not only the whole Orbaneja area — as defined by topography — but also part or all of the territory of other villages, such as Arlanzón or Ibeas, which clearly did not belong to it. It seems that the grazing rights of the inhabitants of Orbaneja reached beyond its boundaries — probably neighbouring units had reciprocal rights in Orbaneja — and this can be seen as an attribute of community membership, as eleventh-century texts make clear.

In 1039 King Fernando I donated to Cardena the smaller monastery of San Vicente ‘in the Orbaneja valley, in the urban territory of Burgos’ (*in valle Orbanelie, in suburbio Vurgos*),<sup>32</sup> which lay right on top of the Atapuerca ridge. Attached to it were rights in pasture and water ‘down to the River Arlanzón’ (*usque in flumine Aslanzon*), totally overlapping with the southern side of those assigned in 963 to

<sup>27</sup> Compare Modubar and Hontoria, above.

<sup>28</sup> Cardena, nos 39, 83, 116, 145, 192.

<sup>29</sup> Cardena, no. 267 (1050).

<sup>30</sup> Donations of whole villages in Castile are a very different affair from mere land transactions, as they involved seigniorial rights over the whole community as such. They are also much less frequent, and tend to be issued by rulers or people from their immediate entourage.

<sup>31</sup> Cardena, no. 109 (963).

<sup>32</sup> Cardena, no. 233 (1039).

Orbaneja de Picos. The rest of the circuit is omitted, but it presumably coincided with the boundaries of the Orbaneja valley itself, since San Vicente did not belong to any particular village, but to the whole valley of Orbaneja.<sup>33</sup> That very year, King Fernando I also conferred upon Cardena special exemptions in three *villae* including Orbaneja de Picos,<sup>34</sup> including those of a military nature — castle repair, military expedition with the king or his delegates, providing men for reconnaissance missions — and subjection to inspection by royal judicial officials, and several others. As a result, the men of Orbaneja de Picos — Cardena's dependants — were set apart from the ordinary network of public obligations and placed exclusively under the abbot's lordship. Yet, they retained their rights as members of the wider community of Orbaneja. This situation triggered a dispute in 1073 over whether the men of Orbaneja de Picos were entitled to share the valley's pastures. In the lawsuit, thirteen local knights (*infanzones*\*) spoke 'for the whole valley of Orbaneja' — that is, four villas: Villa de Plano, Villa de Valle, Cardenuela and Villa de Domna Eilo<sup>35</sup> — and were ultimately defeated by the monks.

Now, the 1073 lawsuit provides precisely the main factor lacking in the Ausín material, namely, collective political action at a supralocal level. Between the tenth and the eleventh centuries, ownership of agricultural land presumably became increasingly confined to the component villages in the valley. However, uncultivated land was managed jointly and shared by the people of the member settlements. It was a part of a network of rights and obligations that can only be defined as political. The men of Orbaneja de Picos had their grazing rights denied because they had strayed beyond the common obligations. Their victory — actually Cardena's — in court was a lethal blow to the very roots of the valley community, and in fact supralocal articulation in Orbaneja fades out thereafter, at least in our written evidence.

A brief review of the Ausín and Orbaneja areas yields a picture of territorial change from larger, topographically consistent supralocal units to smaller village-territories. It also reveals that this process was extremely uneven: in some areas it took place earlier than in others. In some it went nearly totally unrecorded. Orbaneja is remarkable for presenting us with supralocal community links in action at a time when village territories were clearly the dominant pattern; in fact by then

<sup>33</sup> This kind of 'supralocal' monastery is not infrequent, but nothing suggests that they could exercise a pastoral role over the area. Cf. Bassett, this volume.

<sup>34</sup> Cardena, no. 234 (1039).

<sup>35</sup> Cardena, no. 340 (1073).

they were being used as the building blocks of the new parish system. We must now turn our attention to the next territorial level: the administrative districts. This will bring in the issues of spatial hierarchy and relationships with the overall political system, which are crucial to a proper understanding of territoriality.

### *Hierarchy: Central Settlements and Administrative Districts*

The other chief factor in Castile's spatial complexity is the existence of central settlements. I am not concerned here with the many different kinds of spatial focus one can detect on the ground,<sup>36</sup> but more specifically with higher-rank settlements that played a role as a sort of capital of supralocal units and/or districts.

The study of early Castilian central settlements has been much neglected. Administrative districts and their centres were long recognized, but it was their military role that aroused the greatest attention.<sup>37</sup> Most centres had some kind of fortress to which the district's free population owed military obligations. This led many to think that defence was the only reason they were created, so the main component of spatial hierarchization was seen as generated top-down by the Castilian rulers in their ongoing struggle with the Muslims. Local society hardly played any role other than accepting the imposition and fulfilling their obligations.

Since the mid-1980s a more complex vision has been gaining favour, starting with a seminal paper by Carlos Estepa in which he defined the *alfoces* as resulting from the interaction between existing territories and the emerging overall political system.<sup>38</sup> Since the late ninth century, not only governance, justice and defence, but also the management of the counts' patrimonial estates were based upon a network of districts which was to endure until the late twelfth-century creation of new, larger divisions: the so-called *merindades menores*\*.<sup>39</sup> Neither the *alfoces* nor their centres were, however, created from scratch. Their raw material was a

<sup>36</sup> Compare Davies's conclusion to this volume.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Martínez Díez, *Pueblos y alfoces*, pp.10–12.

<sup>38</sup> Estepa Díez, 'El alfoz castellano'.

<sup>39</sup> Álvarez Borge, *Monarquía feudal*. On the difficulties of separating which aspects derived from the counts' ruling functions, and which were due to their 'private' behaviour as estate owners, landlords and patrons of clientèles, see J. Escalona, 'Comunidades, territorios y poder condal en la Castilla del Duero en el siglo x', *Studia Historica: Historia Medieval*, 18–19 (2000–01), 85–120.

web of small territories, deeply rooted in their local contexts, as further studies suggest for Castile and other areas of the northern plateau.<sup>40</sup>

In what follows I explore two possible strategies by which this argument can be pursued. The first consists of looking at district centres and considering their relationship to previous territorial structures; the second consists of checking whether district boundaries conform with the local and supralocal units discussed above. In dealing with both aspects, a general distinction must be kept between the larger districts, whose centres were the main nodes of the articulation of the Castilian county, and the many smaller units that lay among them.

### Central Settlements, Large and Small

The largest district in tenth-century Castile was Clunia. It is also a good example of how long-term continuity combines with extreme changes. A pre-Roman town (*oppidum*\*) turned into Roman city, Clunia was the capital of a huge *conventus iuridicus*\* (administrative/judicial district) comprising all the eastern half of the Duero basin and the corresponding northern lands down to the sea.<sup>41</sup> The town flourished until the third century, but its late Roman phase is characteristically elusive.<sup>42</sup> Being strongly dependent on the overall political system, it seems to have declined in the fifth century to the point that the region's episcopal see in the Visigothic period was established in nearby Uxama (Burgo de Osma).<sup>43</sup> Clunia arguably retained some sort of regional focal role during the earlier Middle Ages, although its character must have changed considerably, depending especially on the scale of the overall political system. Tellingly, it reappears in early tenth-century sources as a major stronghold in the upper Duero region and rises to become the capital of the whole south of the Castilian county in the turbulent second half of

<sup>40</sup> See, among others, for northern Castile: Martín Viso, *Poblamiento y estructuras sociales*, and J. A. Lecanda Esteban, 'Mijangos: arquitectura y ocupación visigoda en el norte de Burgos', in *II Congreso de Arqueología Peninsular* (Zamora, 1996), pp.415–34; and for the south: Escalona, *Sociedad y territorio*, and F. Reyes, *Población y sociedad en el Valle del Duero: Duratón y Riaza en la alta Edad Media, siglos VI al XI* (Madrid, 2002). Also, Martín Viso, *Fragments del Leviatán*.

<sup>41</sup> M. C. García Merino, *Población y poblamiento en la Hispania Romana: El Conventus Cluniensis* (Valladolid, 1975).

<sup>42</sup> Cepas, this volume.

<sup>43</sup> I. Martín Viso, 'Organización episcopal y poder entre la Antigüedad Tardía y el Medioevo (siglos V–XI): Las diócesis de Calahorra, Oca y Osma', *Iberia*, 2 (1999), 151–90.

the century.<sup>44</sup> In this later phase the boundaries of its huge district demonstrably engulfed a number of smaller units, arguably formerly independent *alfoces*.<sup>45</sup>

Clunia may look unique because of its unparalleled importance in the Roman period and in the late tenth to early eleventh century, but the centres of southern Castile's larger *alfoces* (Lara, Lerma, Muñó, Roa, Osma and others) can also often be traced back to Roman towns, even to pre-Roman *oppida*. The mere fact that many of them made it into the high medieval network speaks strongly for overall continuity but it must be stressed that we can hardly reconstruct any part of their evolution between the late Roman or Visigothic periods and the tenth century. Moreover, if these centres date back to earlier times, we have almost no way of knowing what their boundaries were before the evidence of the tenth-century charters, and these often respond to demonstrably recent alterations, as is the case of Clunia or Lara.

Burgos — Castile's tenth-century political capital if it had one — can be contrasted with Clunia. Despite its prominent position overlooking the River Arlanzón and the presence there of a substantial prehistoric hillfort, finds of Roman archaeological material are scanty and it has not been possible to relate it to any node in the Roman itineraries. Instead it lay halfway between other sites, such as Tritium (Monasterio de Rodilla) or Deobrigula (Tardajos). We cannot ascertain why it succeeded in becoming Castile's chief town in the absence of more intense archaeological research,<sup>46</sup> but its takeover in 882 by Count Diego Rodríguez is a major landmark in the Castilian annals, and in the tenth century it was clearly as close to a city as one could get in the county.<sup>47</sup>

Before *alfoz* became the standard term for district in the kingdom, the word *suburbium* was commonly used both for large districts like Burgos as for smaller

<sup>44</sup> Escalona, 'Comunidades, territorios'. The medieval stronghold did not lie on the site of the Roman city — itself built on an outstandingly impressive elevation — but on another hill nearby, where the ruins of the medieval castle are still visible.

<sup>45</sup> See further Escalona, 'Comunidades, territorios'.

<sup>46</sup> J. L. Uríbarri, J. M. Martínez González and I. Leis, *Primeros asentamientos humanos en la ciudad de Burgos* (Burgos, 1987); T. Mañanes and J. M. Solana, *Ciudades y vías romanas en la Cuenca del Duero* (Valladolid, 1985), pp.31–32; J. J. García González, 'Del cerro al castillo: El cerro de Burgos de la Antigüedad a la Edad Media', *Cuadernos Burgaleses de Historia Medieval*, 2 (1995), 71–166.

<sup>47</sup> *Anales Castellanos I*, ed. M. Gómez Moreno (Madrid, 1917), s.a. 882; C. Estepa Díez, 'Burgos en el contexto del nacimiento de la ciudad medieval castellano-leonesa', in *La ciudad de Burgos: Congreso de Historia de Burgos* (Madrid, 1985), pp.23–55.



Photo 7.3. El Castillo, La Muela, and Peña de Lara, from Lara.

ones like Ausín, whose centre's 'urban' character was more than dubious. This suggests that former urban nodes and hinterlands may have played a role in defining the new categories of territorial division, if not their actual nodes and boundaries.

Secondary central settlements have attracted much less attention, and have an even more incomplete archaeological record. Yet cases such as Ausín provide interesting hints. Ausín's fortress lay on a prominent hilltop overlooking the valley (see Photo 7.2). Ramparts and enclosures are clearly recognizable, and the site typically yields pottery from all of the late pre-Roman Iron Age, and from the late Roman period.<sup>48</sup> While, in the early Roman period, the clearest settlement evidence comes from neighbouring lowland sites such as Hontoria de la Cantera and Revilla del Campo, the old hillfort surely remained a strong symbolic presence in the local landscape, although we cannot now be sure of the nature of its late

<sup>48</sup> J. A. Abásolo Álvarez and I. Ruiz Vélez, *Carta arqueológica de la provincia de Burgos: Partido judicial de Burgos* (Burgos, 1977), pp.19–21.

Roman phase.<sup>49</sup> In the absence of excavations, everything suggests that the early medieval settlement did not occupy the hilltop, but was dispersed in a linear pattern along the river, eventually to become nucleated around three foci, each with its own church (another pointer to a higher-rank settlement). By the tenth century — although we do not know from how long before — a castle had been built on the hilltop, which was probably redundant by the early thirteenth century when a church was built, which preserved the site's symbolic relevance down to the present day.<sup>50</sup>

Ausin's case is typical of small *alfoz* centres. Most had a recognizable fortress, very often placed upon an earlier **hilltop site**\*. Surely there is an argument for long-term continuity there but this should be qualified by other facts: a) while ancient sites demonstrably lie under or close to most tenth-century central settlements, others of comparable or greater size did not make it into the Middle Ages; b) the most common pattern is that of a site with late prehistoric material, then a gap for the early Roman period (sometimes starting already in the so-called Celtiberic-phase), then a late Roman reoccupation whose end is typically hard to determine, then an early medieval fortress. Overall, it seems that those sites repeatedly rose as dominant in the neighbouring landscape, but the process is far from simple.<sup>51</sup>

Up to this point, it seems clear that the central fortresses of *alfoces* were commonly placed on sites that often had a local relevance and a long-running history. Yet, were those castles erected or renewed because they were chosen by the Castilian rulers as *alfoz* centres or were they chosen to be so because they were already higher-rank sites in the local landscape, whether they had a fortress or not? We can hardly answer that question at all, at least not by considering the sites alone. At this point, looking at district boundaries will certainly not solve the problem, but it can provide valuable data.

While the boundaries of large districts like Clunia extend beyond and across topographical limits, smaller territories are potentially more likely to keep to the constraints of watercourses, watersheds and other physical landmarks (which of

<sup>49</sup> Martín Viso, this volume, on hilltop site reoccupation; and Halsall and Cepas, this volume, on community redefinition following the ending of the Roman patterns of socio-territorial domination.

<sup>50</sup> J. Escalona 'Poblamiento y organización territorial en el sector oriental de la cuenca del Duero en la Alta Edad Media', in *III Congreso de Arqueología Medieval Española*, 2 vols (Oviedo, 1992), II, 448–55.

<sup>51</sup> Discussion in Escalona, *Sociedad y territorio*, pp.48–55, and Martín Viso, this volume.

course entails a clear risk of determinism). This does not mean, though, that they always did; indeed many alterations are demonstrated.

Take the small valley of the River Mataviejas (whose medieval name was Ura). This is a narrow east–west corridor interrupted in its middle sector by steep, curving slopes, a major obstacle to communication along the valley. In the tenth and eleventh centuries the valley was divided into two *alfoces*: up-river, Tabladillo — whose centre lay on what was arguably a first-century nucleated settlement (*vicus*\*) — and, down-river, Ura, a district homonymous with the river and with its centre, below a hilltop site where late Roman material has been collected. The two *alfoces* are clearly defined by the topography on both sides, but, while their northern boundaries closely match watersheds, their southern limits extend beyond the watershed and eat into other neighbouring hydrographic units. Most of the component villages of the *alfoz* of Tabladillo, as deduced from a list in an 1125 charter,<sup>52</sup> kept to the valley limits, yet a land tract protruded southwards to include the village of Doña Santos, clearly alien to the valley. This arrangement was much earlier than 1125: Talamanquilla — further south from Doña Santos — belonged to Tabladillo until it was granted to Covarrubias Abbey in 978.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, Tabladillo's southern expansion dated back at least to the military difficulties of the tenth century that triggered the reorganization of the frontier sector dominated by Clunia.<sup>54</sup> This may also shed some light on the origins of similar features in neighbouring Ura, whose district also shows a south/south-west expansion beyond watersheds in the Nebreda-Cebrecos sector, which we cannot explore further through written sources.

Phenomena of this kind are better recorded in the Ausín district (Fig. 7.2). In the tenth century it comprised several units which eventually split into two or more villages each (Hontoria, Revilla, the Modúbares, the Cubillos). Yet, before that situation came about, their internal consistency was also affected by changes in district boundaries. Take the Modúbar valley. While place-names show it as a unit, its western half was captured by the all-important *alfoz* of Burgos, as was the case with other neighbouring territories.<sup>55</sup> Much later, the now deserted village

<sup>52</sup> *Documentación del monasterio de Santo Domingo de Silos (954–1254)*, ed. M. C. Vivancos (Burgos, 1988), nos 37–38.

<sup>53</sup> *Cartulario del Infantado de Covarrubias*, ed. L. Serrano (Valladolid, 1907), nos 7–8.

<sup>54</sup> Escalona, 'Comunidades, territorios'.

<sup>55</sup> J. Escalona, 'Acerca de la territorialidad en la Castilla altomedieval: Tres casos significativos', in *Historia social, pensamiento historiográfico y Edad Media*, ed. I. Loring García (Madrid, 1997), pp.217–44.



of Tabladillo — not the same as the aforementioned *alfoz* of Tabladillo — belonged to Ausín in 1011, but was captured thereafter by neighbouring Lara, its name changing to Tabladillo de Lara.<sup>56</sup> A third occurrence — Lara's absorption of the uppermost settlement in the Cubillo valley, whose name changed to Cubillejo de Lara — has left little more than traces in the place-names.

The fact that, over a long time-span, *alfoz* boundaries cut across smaller territorial units regardless of topographic and/or toponymic unity not only shows that there was a degree of autonomy between local and higher political levels. It also suggests that there was a pre-existing territorial structure which was partially preserved and reused, and partially modified in the course of time.

### *Scale Change and Territories: Where Is the Community?*

The latter part of this chapter has dealt with administrative districts, which, like ecclesiastical divisions,<sup>57</sup> belonged to large-scale networks of power. This raises the major issue: the relationship between the top-down territorial units portrayed in our sources and the webs of community relationships that we want to investigate. We are as yet far from having fully satisfactory answers to this question. Suffice it to say that it is complex enough to rule out any simple explanation.

In the cases I have discussed, and despite the increasing stress upon the village-community, community bonds seem to be better defined as a complex set of overlapping, multifaceted relationships, running from the very local to the supralocal. Residence is the first obvious sphere, but we still need much more archaeological research if we are to understand when and how the dominant pattern of discrete nucleated settlements came into being. Also, the evidence discussed suggests that property patterns and economic activities may well have worked at a supralocal scale (Orbaneja, Modúbar, the Cubillos) before they became more and more confined to the individual villages within them. Patterns of access to uncultivated land and other resources such as water, woodland or mining seem to have worked at a similar middle-scale. The larger, top-down designed districts were not suitable for that. For all we know, neither Burgos nor Clunia were grazing-rights units, and Lara only laid that claim at a very late date. Orbaneja was clearly this sort of territory as late as 1073, and there are hints that in other small territories such as

<sup>56</sup> *Cartulario de San Pedro de Arlanza*, ed. Serrano, no. 111.

<sup>57</sup> Bassett, this volume.

Tabladillo or Valdelaguna, grazing rights worked at an *alfoz* scale and were relevant to community membership.<sup>58</sup>

I hope to have shown that southern Castilian tenth- and eleventh-century territorial structures were more complex and dynamic than the established views would have us think. Individual settlements belonged to several layers of overlapping territoriality: villages, larger valley-like settlement units, a centre's hinterland, the county, and the kingdom. Moreover, the whole system was changing at a rapid pace, determined by the inclusion of a large number of pre-existing building-blocks into Castile's increasingly integrated political framework. Whether absorbed into larger districts or *turned into* districts themselves, the early units gave way to a system whose greater emphasis was on the local articulation of central power,<sup>59</sup> that is, of the main mechanisms by which the local population interacted with an ever more distant political system: justice, tribute-collecting, labour-services, military obligations, and so on. In the long run, this favoured a threefold pattern.<sup>60</sup> Households were arranged in local communities of village/parish size, in turn grouped into larger units that were more the administrative tools of top-down government and less a territorial expression of the complexity of local society. Households and villages were suitable as units for the extraction of both taxes and lordly revenues, which ultimately depended upon domination over peasant households and ownership of agricultural land. The twelfth-century formation of the new division in *merindades menores*, only relatively dependent on the earlier *alfoces*, was a major landmark in this separation between the village and the district. The earlier supralocal territories seem to have largely faded out, but left traces in the form of grazing rights shared between groups of villages, or supralocal patterns of military obligations or tribute payments, into the late medieval and early modern periods.

<sup>58</sup> J. Escalona, 'Jerarquización social y organización del espacio: Bosques y pastizales en la Sierra de Burgos', in *Los rebaños de Gerión: Pastores y trashumancia en Iberia antigua y medieval*, ed. J. Gómez-Pantoja, Collection de la Casa de Velázquez, 73 (Madrid, 2001), pp.109–37.

<sup>59</sup> S. Castellanos and I. Martín Viso, 'The Local Articulation of Central Power in the North of the Iberian Peninsula (500–1000)', *Early Medieval Europe*, 13 (2005), 1–42.

<sup>60</sup> J. A. García de Cortázar and E. Peña Bocos, 'De alfoces, aldeas y solares en la Castilla de los siglos IX al XI: ¿una formalización "feudal" del espacio?', in *Miscellania en Homenatge al P. Agustí Altisent* (Tarragona, 1991), pp.183–202.

# CENTRAL PLACES AND THE TERRITORIAL ORGANIZATION OF COMMUNITIES: THE OCCUPATION OF HILLTOP SITES IN EARLY MEDIEVAL NORTHERN CASTILE

Iñaki Martín Viso

## *The Occupation of Hilltop Sites: Ancient Roots, New Phases*

In spite of the introduction of new methods and theories in Castilian historiography on the early Middle Ages,<sup>1</sup> the lack of contemporary sources makes analysis difficult and different explanations exist, many of them highly speculative. One possible way of transcending this problem is through the study of the social evolution of settlements as part of the transformations of late antiquity and the early Middle Ages. In this context, I want to focus my analysis on the occupation of **hilltop sites**\*, whose occupation is revealed in our data from the fifth century onwards.<sup>2</sup> Ninth- and tenth-century written documents and chronicles frequently refer to forts, named *castra* or *castella*\*, in different districts and archaeology has made clear the vitality of these hilltop sites in some areas of the Iberian peninsula.<sup>3</sup> In describing the occupation of these sites, two essential

<sup>1</sup> See Escalona, this volume.

<sup>2</sup> A clear example is the mention of the *castella tutiora*, in which the population took shelter from the Suevic incursions, Hydatius, *Chronicon*, ed. J. Campos (Salamanca, 1984), VI.439–45.

<sup>3</sup> See A. Barrios García and I. Martín Viso, 'Reflexiones sobre el poblamiento rural altomedieval en el Norte de la Península Ibérica', *Studia Historica: Historia Medieval*, 18–19 (2000–01), 53–83; J. López Quiroga, 'Fluctuaciones del poblamiento y hábitat "fortificado" de Altura en el Noroeste de la Península Ibérica (ss. V–IX)', in *Mil Anos de Fortificações na Península Ibérica e no Magreb (500–1500)* (Lisbon, 2001), pp.83–91.

factors must be underlined. On the one hand, not all occupation was similar, meaning that the places under study had different histories: different functions, varied degrees of intensity of occupation, ruptures and continuities should be identified on each site. On the other hand, the Iberian landscape, specifically its northern and central regions, is very heterogeneous and so in some areas there was no general process of occupation of hilltop sites.<sup>4</sup>

Hilltop sites became very important in the territory that became the County of Castile from the first third of the tenth century. The name Castile, which began to be common from the second half of the ninth century, comes from Latin *castella* and refers to the abundance of fortifications. Many recent analyses have pointed out the role of these places as foci for the socio-political articulation of early medieval Castile.<sup>5</sup> I want to discuss some problems and make some remarks on that issue through the study of one specific area: northern Castile, the region around the high basins of the rivers Ebro and Pisuerga, now part of the provinces of Palencia, Burgos, Cantabria and La Rioja (Fig. 8.1). This zone of approximately 5000 km<sup>2</sup> was identified, from the tenth century, with the district of *Castella Vetula* (Old Castile). It is very fragmented geographically as well as being very heterogeneous in terms of its early medieval landscape and social evolution.

The most usual explanation for the occupation of hilltop sites postulates their abandonment after the Roman conquest and their later reoccupation from the fifth century onwards, on the basis of the clear hiatus in the archaeological record.<sup>6</sup> Their reactivation would result from the increase in political instability, although their occupation was less intense than in the pre-Roman period.<sup>7</sup> In the

<sup>4</sup> For example, the Cantabrian areas. See I. García Camino, *Arqueología y Poblamiento en Bizkaia (siglos VI–XII): La Configuración de la Sociedad Feudal* (Bilbao, 2002) and J. A. Gutiérrez González, ed., *Peñaferuz (Gijón): El Castillo de Curiel y su Territorio* (Gijón, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> See J. Escalona Monge, *Sociedad y territorio en la Alta Edad Media Castellana: La formación del alfoz de Lara*, British Archaeological Reports, International Series, 1079 (Oxford, 2002); R. Vázquez, 'Castros, castillos y torres en la organización social del espacio en Castilla: el espacio del Arlanza al Duero (siglos IX a XIII)', in *Del Cantábrico al Duero: Trece Estudios sobre Organización Social del Espacio en los siglos VIII a XIII*, ed. J. Á. García de Cortázar (Santander, 1999), pp.351–73, and I. Martín Viso, *Poblamiento y estructuras sociales en el norte de la Península Ibérica (siglos VI–XIII)* (Salamanca, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> See J. A. Gutiérrez González, *Fortificaciones y Feudalismo en el Origen y Formación del Reino Leonés (siglos IX–XIII)* (Valladolid, 1995).

<sup>7</sup> A. Domínguez Bolaños and J. Nuño González, 'Reflexiones sobre sistemas defensivos tardoantiguos en la Cuenca del Duero: a propósito de la muralla de "El Cristo de San Esteban", Muelas del Pan (Zamora)', in *La Hispania de Teodosio*, ed. R. Teja and C. Pérez, 2 vols (Salamanca, 1997), II, 435–50.

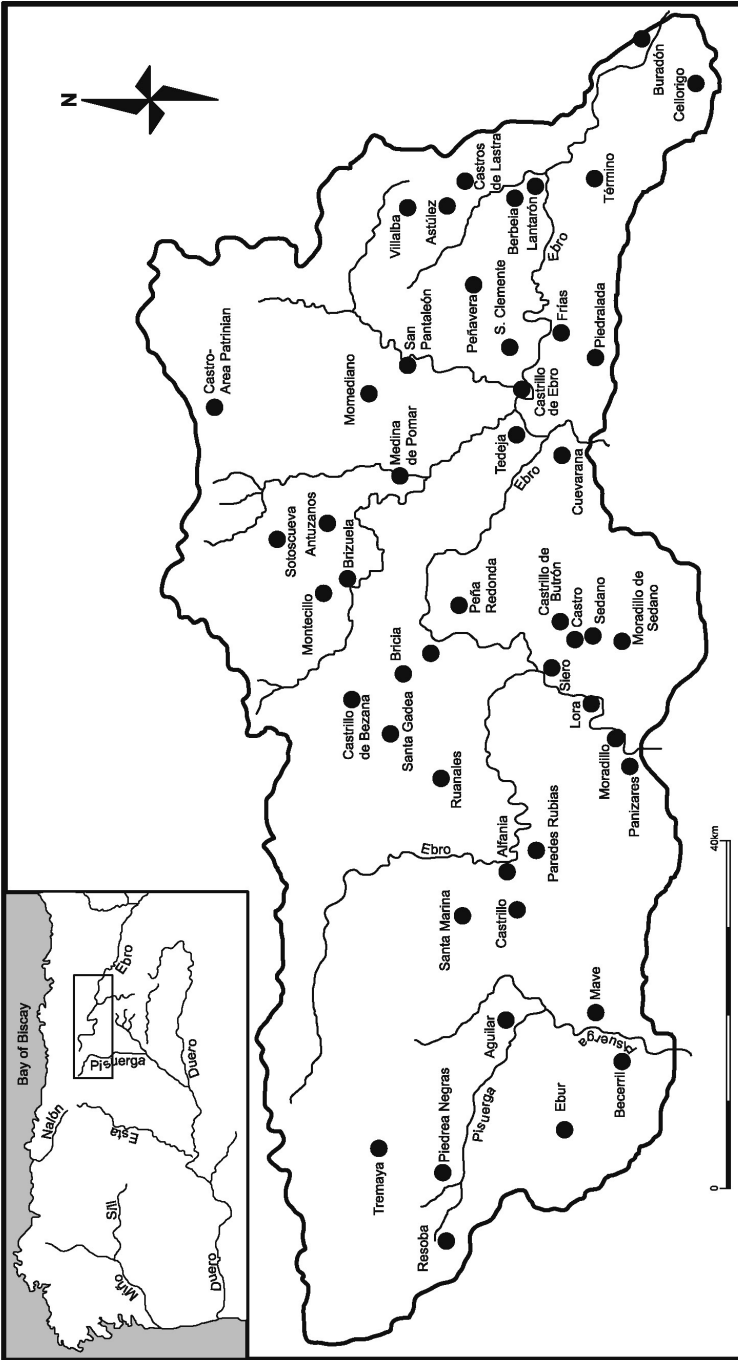


Figure 8.1.1. Hilltop sites of Northern Castile (sixth–eleventh centuries).

Castilian case, the rupture between pre-Roman and medieval strata appears on many sites. Thus, Monte Cildá (Olleros del Pisuerga), doubtless to be identified as the main focus of the late antique *civitas*\* of Mave, was reused from the fifth to eighth centuries. Some refortification was carried out after settlement was moved in the Roman period to the plain around the present-day village of Santa María de Mave.<sup>8</sup> However, tenth- and eleventh-century written documents reveal numerous examples of hilltop sites as functioning elements within the settlement pattern. The documents describing the endowment of the monastery of San Salvador de Oña at its foundation in 1011 mention several, such as Castello Dei (probably Medina de Pomar), Santa Gadea del Cid or Alfania.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, many of the place-names of these sites seem to be pre-Roman (note the use of the suffix *-on* in the original forms of names such as Siero, Berbeia or Alfania) and others describe a defensive structure (*muratiello*, *castriello*). Although this is not a decisive argument, it is very strange that the pre-Roman names of these sites, which were completely abandoned without developing any local function, should have been preserved for more than four hundred years. Furthermore, the new and permanent occupation of some hilltop sites throughout our period must have involved profound transformations in local economic organization, and these cannot have been brought about very quickly. Consequently, the theory of reoccupation cannot provide a general explanation for the occupation of hilltops, although it would have applied in some cases. A possible explanation is that some of these sites could have survived with certain important transformations as part of the Roman network.

The archaeology carried out to date provides poor information but there are some sites that yield interesting, though problematic, data. One is Siero, a hill fort on the confluence of the rivers Rudrón and Ebro, formed by a residential area and probably an old fortification located on the summit, where a hermitage devoted to Saints Centola and Elena now stands. Surveys carried out in that area have discovered an Iron Age phase followed by a Roman one but the most usual evidence found is a kind of smooth or grooved wheel-turned painted pottery, dated to the early Middle Ages but without a clear chronology.<sup>10</sup> The presence of

<sup>8</sup> L. Hernández Guerra and L. Sagredo San Antonio, *La Romanización del territorio de la actual provincia de Palencia* (Valladolid, 1998), pp.44–54 and 108–09.

<sup>9</sup> *Colección Diplomática de los Condes de Castilla*, ed. M. Zabalza Duque (Salamanca, 1998), doc. 64.

<sup>10</sup> R. Bohigas Roldán and others, 'Carta Arqueológica de la Provincia de Burgos: Partidos Judiciales de Sedano y Villarcayo', *Kobie*, 14 (1984), 7–91 (pp.21–22 and 28); J. Campillo Cueva,

an eighth- or ninth-century inscription, still extant in a wall of the hermitage, seems to underline the use of this place during that period, although its present location is not the original one.<sup>11</sup> According to written records, this place gave its name to a territorial district or *alfoz*\* during the tenth and eleventh centuries, and it might have been the centre of a **supralocal unit**\*.<sup>12</sup> Another similar case is Berbeia, located on one of the promontories near Bachicabo Peak, just above Barrio de Valdegovía, with visual control of the valley of the Omecillo. Excavations carried out there revealed a cultural sequence that started in the second Iron Age and continued, although with clear contraction, through the Roman period. In the Middle Ages, however, this place was used again, with an occupation defined as 'light' compared with the pre-Roman phase, and detected on the basis of some wheel-turned pottery. The settlement was divided into two sections, a residential area, with the remains of buildings with stone foundations, and a defensive one, situated higher up.<sup>13</sup> Written documents reveal its presence as a populated site in the early medieval period, and it is still mentioned in 1123.<sup>14</sup>

A pronounced hiatus during the early Roman period was apparently common. A very rigid view of the archaeological data compels us to consider a sudden breakdown in the use of hill forts during the Roman era followed by later reoccupation. However Roman phases were identified only by the presence of sherds of pottery known as *terra sigillata*. Some occupation from the Roman period could, therefore, be hidden, particularly in peripheral zones, and only revealed in the late Roman centuries thanks to late Hispanic *sigillata* (Terra Sigillata Hispanica tardía). I want to propose another view, based on the different degrees of intensity in the use of hilltop sites during successive periods. A territorial hierarchy was formed, focussed on hill forts with separate residential and defensive functions in two sections and with a subordinate territory round about. Roman domination undoubtedly favoured the development of new types of settlement linked to

'Los despoblados medievales de la Honor de Sedano (Burgos)', *Kobie*, 24 (1997), 125–68 (pp.152–53).

<sup>11</sup> S. Andrés Ordax, 'Arte Burgalés de la alta edad media', in *II Jornadas Burgalesas de Historia: Burgos en la Alta Edad Media* (Burgos, 1991), pp.125–40 (pp.135–36).

<sup>12</sup> *Becerro Gótico de Cardeña*, ed. L. Serrano (Valladolid, 1910), doc. 270; I. Martín Viso, 'Monasterios y Poder Aristocráticos en Castilla en el siglo XI', *Brocar*, 20 (1996), 91–133 (doc. 6).

<sup>13</sup> J. A. Algorreta and others, 'Castro de Berbeia (Barrio-Álava): Memoria de excavaciones, Campaña de 1972', *Estudios de Arqueología Alavesa*, 8 (1975), 221–92.

<sup>14</sup> *Colección Diplomática Condes de Castilla*, ed. Zabalza Duque, docs 30 and 73; *Los Cartularios Gótico y Galicano de Santa María de Valpuesta (1090–1140)*, ed. S. Ruiz de Loizaga (Vitoria, 1995), Gótico, doc. 136.

structures of ownership and power that did not exist before, to the profit of some local aristocratic groups, as in the **villa-estates\*** of Las Ermitas (Espejo) or those of the Losa Valley.<sup>15</sup> The intensity of the use of hilltop sites probably decreased, but they continued to form part of the Roman rural landscape. The disintegration of the Roman system promoted the renewed influence of local aristocratic groups, diluting the hierarchy established by the Romans. Later, the Visigothic realm needed to negotiate with local authorities, in order to strengthen its political dominion. In this context, each community could obtain greater autonomy and so used the hilltop sites more intensively. Thus, a sequence generally dated as early medieval can be detected. The function of these places was above all political and they worked as a territorial representation of communities' autonomy, and especially as refuges. The key lies in considering the hilltop site not as an isolated element, but as part of a system: its creation cannot be understood outside a pattern of exploitation of resources founded in strong community autonomy. It was a dynamic system and changed down the centuries, with successive transformations that did not break the general pattern and always kept the hill fort, although the latter lost some of its previous functions during the Roman Period.<sup>16</sup>

### *Peasant and Central Power Initiatives*

The location of many hilltop sites in northern Castile reflects an interest in making complementary use of lowland and upland areas. The choice of this pattern was connected with small-scale transhumance or with the desire to control the richest agrarian land, and so the site would be located outside these areas. The hilltop sites generally preferred marginal locations close to local routes, but not to Roman roads, and do not reveal any large-scale architectural works. These features imply that they were spaces created by very cohesive communities with strong internal autonomy.

A good example of this type of territorial organization is Valderredible, a valley situated in present-day Cantabria, close to the source of the Ebro. One of the Valderredible's hilltop sites is Ruanales, a place quoted in a document of 962 that

<sup>15</sup> I. Filloy Nieva, 'Yacimiento de Las Ermitas (Espejo)', *Arkeoikuska* (1995), 295–302; J. A. Abásolo Álvarez and F. Pérez, 'Excavaciones en Salinas de Rosío (Burgos)', *Noticiario Arqueológico Hispano*, 24 (1985), 159–264.

<sup>16</sup> I. Martín Viso, 'Pervivencia y transformación de los sistemas castrales en la formación del feudalismo en la Castilla del Ebro', in *Comunidades locales y poderes feudales en la Edad Media*, coord. I. Álvarez Borge (Logroño, 2001), pp.255–88.



refers to the presence of lands and mills 'in Rabanales' and perhaps refers to a territory, although this is not certain.<sup>17</sup> Its location seems to be the current village of the same name, situated on a hill 970 m high, controlling an area of pasture near Mount Ijedo as well as the basin of the river Panero.<sup>18</sup> There are no remains of fortifications at this site but, since they could have been of timber, they would probably have been destroyed by the present residential area. Little is known about the early medieval settlement pattern; the only contemporary remains in the area — although problematic — are cemeteries of graves cut into the rock in the neighbourhood. They probably were linked to a dispersed pattern, but we need more information and research on these sites. The definition of this territory is best explained by the exploitation of summer pastures on Mount Ijedo, together with the lowland ones of the Panero basin (Fig. 8.2).<sup>19</sup>

A similar site is Castrillo de Valdelomar, the centre of the district of Valdelomar, a stretch of valley in the West Valderredible. This site is located at the top of a hill, from where there is visual control of the plain of the Mardancho stream, close to Mount Ijedo and the bleak plateau Lora. Although there is little documentary evidence for Castrillo de Valdelomar, previous occupation can be accepted on the basis of the existence of a cemetery of graves cut into the rock on the hill where the present-day **parish**\* church stands.<sup>20</sup> A local route, traversing the valley horizontally, had great influence in connecting the places of the district. Therefore, the main impulse was the control of the natural resources of an area which preserved strong communal ownership and whose origin was probably linked to this territorial organization.<sup>21</sup> The third hilltop site is Alfania, in the middle of Valderredible, whose location can be identified with the so-called Ermita del Monte, on the foothills of Mount Ijedo, 2 km away from the present-day village of Villanueva la Nía. This site and its district, defined as an *alfóz*, were mentioned in the first half of the eleventh century.<sup>22</sup> Its location seems to be

<sup>17</sup> *Colección Diplomática del Monasterio de Sahagún (siglos IX y X)*, ed. J. M. Mínguez (León, 1976), doc. 207.

<sup>18</sup> R. Bohigas Roldán, *Yacimientos Arqueológicos Medievales del Sector Central de la Montaña Cantábrica* (Santander, 1986), pp.190–91 and 196.

<sup>19</sup> This last area was part of the *alfóz* of Bricia after the division of Castile between García III and Fernando I in the middle of the eleventh century. *Burgos*, doc. 178.

<sup>20</sup> Bohigas Roldán, *Yacimientos*, pp.188–89.

<sup>21</sup> See J. Ortega Valcárcel, *La Cantabria Rural: Sobre la Montaña* (Santander, 1987), pp.15–16.

<sup>22</sup> *Colección Diplomática Condes de Castilla*, ed. Zabalza Duque, docs 64 and 75; *Colección Diplomática San Salvador de Oña (822–1284)*, ed. J. del Álamo (Madrid, 1950), doc. 35.

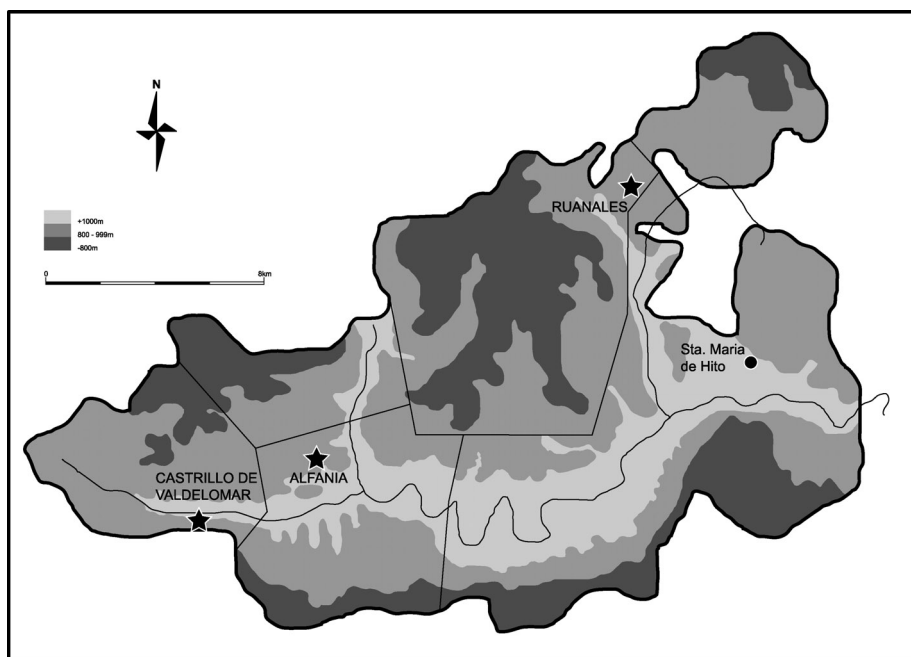


Figure 8.2. Territorial organization and hilltop sites in the valley of Valderredible.

related to the domination of some areas close to the Ebro, perhaps with a dispersed settlement pattern. Some of the most important information about this territory comes from a document of 1014, in which the count of Castile promised to defend the use of communal lands by the inhabitants of Berzosa and Alfania, represented by some local leaders ('omes de concilio').<sup>23</sup> That piece of land was the economic basis of the system ruled from the hilltop site (Fig. 8.3).

The study of Valderredible shows how these hilltop sites shaped territorial structures larger than the villages. This kind of articulation was probably developed as a dominant factor in the early medieval Castilian landscape.<sup>24</sup> They existed in the tenth and eleventh centuries but perhaps also in the previous period too, like the rock-cut graves and the pre-Roman place-names of the central sites

<sup>23</sup> *Colección Diplomática Condes de Castilla*, ed. Zabalza Duque, doc. 75.

<sup>24</sup> See Escalona, this volume. I. Álvarez Borge, *Monarquía feudal y organización territorial: Alfoces y merindades en Castilla (siglos X–XIV)* (Madrid, 1993).

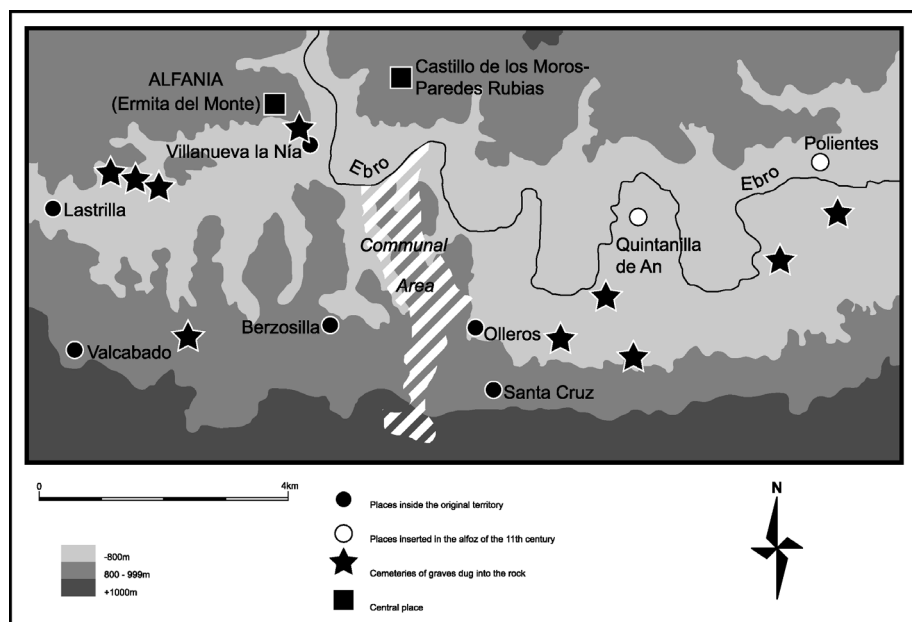


Figure 8.3. The territory of Alfania-Paredes Rubias.

mentioned above. Nevertheless, not all the valley was organized into territories around these hilltop sites and some areas were excluded, because another pattern of territorial articulation emerged during these centuries. The most evident sign is the villa-estate of Santa María de Hito, whose residential area was used as a cemetery after the Roman era.<sup>25</sup> The establishment of the nearby monastery of San Martín de Elines, which retains some remains of an early medieval '**mozarabí**' church,<sup>26</sup> would have been closely connected with the transformation of the social basis of the aristocracy in the post-Roman period. The local elite invested in this religious centre to strengthen its legitimacy and safeguard extensive, indivisible ownership.<sup>27</sup> This zone must be identified with the territory of *Val de Ripa Yble*, a space without a central hilltop site.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup> R. Gimeno García-Lomas, 'El conjunto de cerámicas medievales de Santa María de Hito', in *I Congreso de Arqueología Medieval Española*, 5 vols (Zaragoza, 1985), II, 385–401.

<sup>26</sup> Bohigas Roldán, *Yacimientos*, pp.199–200.

<sup>27</sup> See Halsall, this volume.

<sup>28</sup> See Burgos, doc. 20.

In spite of the priority of peasant or community initiative, the central authorities sometimes promoted the occupation of hilltop sites. One of their main features was their location in certain geo-strategically important areas, like gorges or places near important routes. However, the aim was not exclusively to guarantee the use of military routes but also to make their domination of the region effective through 'islands of authority', especially over the most powerful agrarian zones. The genesis of some of those places can be traced back to the Roman period, although they undoubtedly saw more intensive use during the period between the sixth and eleventh centuries. The most eminent of this kind of site in northern Castile is Tedeja. It is located on the foothills of Sierra de la Tesla, from which one could control the wide plain between Villarcayo and Medina de Pomar — one of the main agrarian areas of the region — and the La Horadada pass, a narrow gorge of the Ebro. Tedeja was initially a Roman *turris* (tower) but it was turned into a fortified nucleus in the Visigothic period (sixth–seventh centuries). The considerable dimensions of this site and the complex works carried out, with the raising of towers and very solid stone walls, have to be emphasized because they are specific characteristics of Tedeja.<sup>29</sup> It was probably used as a focus from where Visigothic authority could have been extended in the area, and the most eloquent traces of Visigothic presence in northern Castile have been found in precisely this place. The consecration of the church of Santa María de Mijangos, at the bottom of Tedeja, by Bishop Asterio of Oca at the end of the sixth century implies that the place also served as the region's ecclesiastical focus. The residential area was not nucleated on the hilltop site, but developed on the plain, close to the river, in Vallejo de Santillán, where a cemetery and some buildings have been found (Fig. 8.4).<sup>30</sup>

The pattern of Tedeja shows some features of the hilltop sites created by the central power: the priority placed on a geo-strategic position, the clear difference between a large political and military area and a residential one, the consolidation of spacious walled enclosures and the use of complex techniques of fortification. The shaping of these 'islands of authority' was subordinated to the raising of

<sup>29</sup> R. Bohigas Roldán and others, 'Evolución de las formas y funciones de la arquitectura en el Norte de Hispania: el caso de Tedeja', in *3º Congreso de Arqueología Peninsular*, 8 vols (Oporto, 2001), VI, 555–68; J. Á. Lecanda Esteban, 'Mijangos: la aportación de la epigrafía y el análisis arqueológico al conocimiento de la transición a la alta edad media en Castilla', in *Visigodos y Omeyas: Un Debate entre la Antigüedad Tardía y la Alta Edad Media*, ed. L. Caballero and P. Mateos (Madrid, 2000), pp.181–206 (pp.194–97).

<sup>30</sup> Lecanda Esteban, 'Mijangos', pp.197–99.

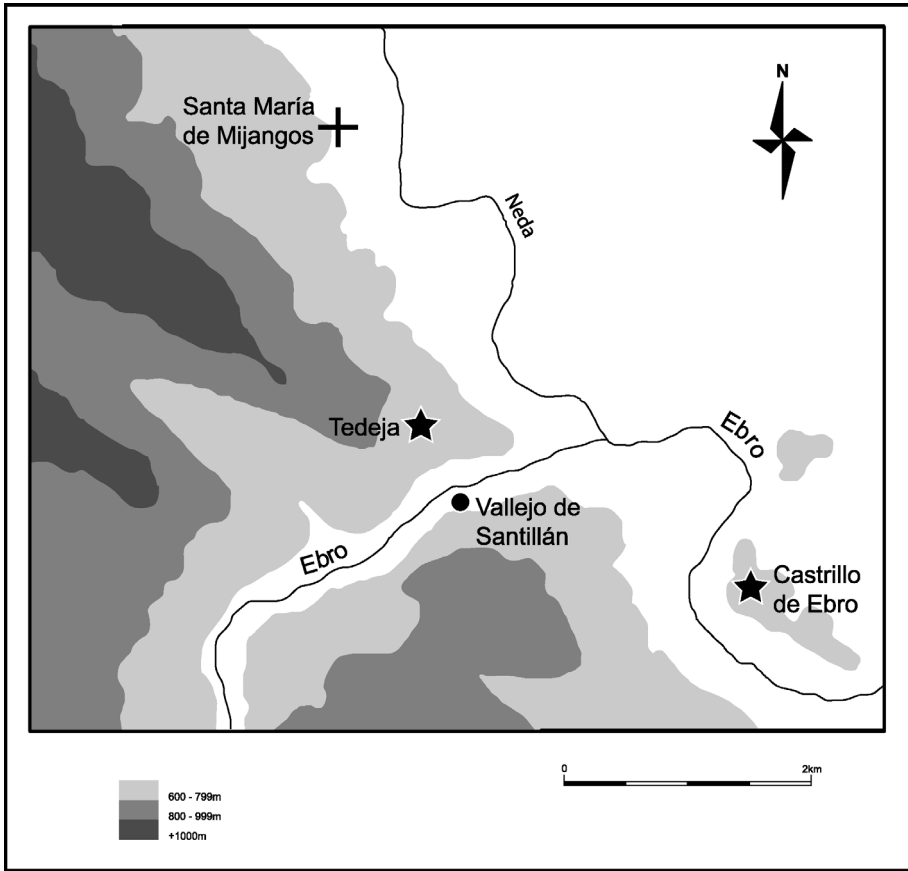


Figure 8.4. The area of Tedeja.

tribute and the establishment of political power structures into which the local leaders were undoubtedly inserted. A similar case was Buradón, a site of Roman origin formed by a fort, probably used between the fifth and tenth centuries, and by a settlement on the slope. This place controlled the gorge of 'Conchas de Haro' and it was close to the basin of Miranda, a very rich agrarian plain. Archaeological work has revealed a military structure and a church, perhaps raised in the fifth century, which underwent enlargement during the early Middle Ages.<sup>31</sup> Both elements were connected with the area's political and religious frameworks. On

<sup>31</sup> M. Unzueta and A. Martínez, 'Proyecto de variante y túnel entre las Conchas de Haro y el Cruce de Briñas', in *Arqueología de Urgencia en Álava, 1989-1993* (Vitoria, 1994), pp.43-60.

the other hand, the fact that the houses were built in stone would mark it out as a prestigious site. This site must be linked to Bilibio, a place mentioned in the seventh century as a fort (*castellum Bilibium*),<sup>32</sup> whose supposed remains have been located on the other side of the pass, where the hermitage of San Felices de Bilibio now stands. A stretch of wall made of regular stone blocks, of a type unknown in the communal structures, is preserved in this small site. One possible hypothesis would be that this last site was a fortified strong-point linked to Buradón, which was the axis of the territory called Bilibio.

Both examples allow us to assert that the Visigothic kingdom of Toledo was able to form 'islands of authority' from which its power was extended in northern Castile, though becoming weaker the further it radiated out from the centre. But they are the only cases — alongside Mave — of this kind of hilltop site in northern Castile. That pattern was later the key to the articulation of socio-political higher-rank polities during the eighth and ninth centuries, when any centralized power disappeared in the *meseta*. Tedeja seems to have been the main nucleus of one of the polities identified in 865<sup>33</sup> that would later give rise to the political formation based from 930 around the figure of Fernán González. On the other hand, the same Fernán González was mentioned in 964 as count in Buradón,<sup>34</sup> which would reflect that place's importance as an axis of political dominion in northern Castile. However, the absence of central authority combined with the permanence of the socio-political basis of local leadership favoured the creation of new places of power focussed on certain hilltop sites. The most significant was Lantarón, seat of one of the main Castilian counties before unification.<sup>35</sup> Its location is still unknown, but it was probably on the site where the hermitage of San Martín de Lantarón now stands. If this identification is correct, its location repeated the use of a spot overlooking a gorge of the Ebro at a strategic point, thanks to the confluence of the routes that cross the valleys of Tobalina and Valdegovía.

<sup>32</sup> Sancti Braulonis Caesaragustanis Episcopi, *Vita Sancti Emiliani*, ed. L. Vázquez de Parga (Madrid, 1943), section 9, lines 3–4.

<sup>33</sup> Ibn Idari, *Historia de Al-Andalus*, ed. F. Fernández González (Málaga, 1999), p.135. The so-called lord (*sahib*) of *Misanika* (Mijangos, on the foot of Tedeja) was quoted in this text, referring to an Arab campaign against the Castilian region.

<sup>34</sup> *Cartulario de San Millán de la Cogolla (759–1076)*, ed. A. Ubieto Arteta (Valencia, 1976), doc. 85.

<sup>35</sup> See I. Martín Viso, 'Poder político y estructura social en la Castilla altomedieval: el condado de Lantarón (siglos VIII–XI)', in *Los Espacios de Poder en la España Medieval*, coord. J. I. de la Iglesia Duarte (Logroño, 2002), pp.533–52.

Nevertheless, there are no remains of fortifications; if they existed, they have been demolished. The aim was the control of the rich agrarian areas of Valdegovía and Miranda, in which some minor territories focussed on hilltop sites endured.<sup>36</sup>

### *The Transformations From the Eighth to the Eleventh Centuries*

Social, political and economic organization between the sixth and eleventh centuries in the Duero basin was based on very different cells of local power, such as hill forts, cities, monasteries or villa-estates. Each one worked as an arena wherein any real influence of central power had to be negotiated. But the system experienced a great change during the eighth century, due to the collapse of central authority. The new status quo is explained by the disintegration of the Visigothic kingdom after the Arab invasion of 711, the low interest of the Umayyads in the direct control of the northern Iberian plateau and the inability of the regional aristocracies to restore a central political apparatus. The local units, well-adapted to the particular needs of their communities, consolidated their role in a fragmented world.<sup>37</sup> Many small-scale leaderships emerged throughout this region, but none achieved hegemony. The formation of some polities was a long process, culminating in this part of the *meseta* in the crystallization of the County of Castile around 930. A determinant factor was the promotion of some aristocratic groups, distinguished by a strong military ethos and able to be inserted into a new large-scale system, working as the dominant social group.<sup>38</sup> The supralocal units were transformed into the basic axis of the configuration of aristocratic power, because they were, at the lower, smaller-scale, level, the arena for economic, social, political and religious organization. Many were focussed on hilltop sites, although there are outstanding exceptions. These transformations should be connected with the progressive feudalization of Castilian society, which produced very different effects. I want to draw attention to one of them, the 'aristocratization' of the hilltop settlements and the gradual loss of their function as a main focus of the

<sup>36</sup> See Martín Viso, 'Poder político', pp.538–39.

<sup>37</sup> S. Castellanos and I. Martín Viso, 'The Local Articulation of Central Power in the North of the Iberian Peninsula (500–1000)', *Early Medieval Europe*, 13 (2005), 1–42; Escalona Monge, *Sociedad y territorio*, pp.58–72; I. Martín Viso, *Fragments del Leviatán: La articulación política del espacio zamorano en la alta edad media* (Zamora, 2002), pp.39–65.

<sup>38</sup> I. Álvarez Borge, 'Estructuras de poder en castilla en la alta edad media: señores, siervos, vasallos', in *Señores, Siervos, Vasallos en la Edad Media* (Pamplona, 2002), pp.269–308.

spatial hierarchy. They were an instrument through which the local leaders' military monopoly could be consolidated, and the political and economic resources of communities controlled — due to the centralization of military duties in the fortress — and, in general, through which other social groups could be dominated.

The passage from 'peasant castles' to 'aristocratic fortress' was very simple in the case of the great nuclei created by the central authorities. Tedeja is a good example, because it was one of the early counties of the ninth century and later a seat of Castilian power.<sup>39</sup> Excavations show the persistence of a strong defensive structure and the remodelling of the adjoining ancient church of Santa María (probably abandoned in the tenth century), resembling the settlement of Vallejo de Santillán.<sup>40</sup> This area was very important in the articulation of large-scale power before the crystallization of the County of Castile. It probably lay at the origin of the district of *Castella Vetula*, in which other lesser-rank sub-systems were inserted.<sup>41</sup> Lantarón and Buradón had a similar evolution and they were the chief places of important districts from which the Castilian county was formed in this area. However, they experienced a clear decline from the end of the tenth century. They were replaced by new sites (like Término-Santa Gadea del Cid, to the detriment of Lantarón),<sup>42</sup> or fossilized as topographical names (Tedeja),<sup>43</sup> and sometimes even the place-name changed, as with the transformation of Buradón into Bilibio. All are different signs of a process of abandonment, demonstrated archaeologically in Tedeja and Buradón. Their decadence would be linked to the formation of a new social system, which implied a change in the reference-points of power. Feudal lords exercised their dominion through the control over the peasant working process and not over the socio-political resources of communities, and through the participation in a new central political apparatus organized around feudal relationships.

There were other hilltop sites of smaller size that controlled minor areas. The recognition of these territories as political districts named *alfoces* by the Castilian

<sup>39</sup> It was the seat of a royal agent, with some fiscal and judicial functions, in the middle of the eleventh century. *Colección Diplomática San Salvador de Oña*, ed. Álamo, doc. 27.

<sup>40</sup> Lecanda Esteban, 'Mijangos'.

<sup>41</sup> R. Bohigas Roldán and others, 'Tedeja y el Control político del territorio del Norte Burgalés en Época Tardorromana, Visigoda, Alto y Plenomedieval', in *V Congreso de Arqueología Medieval Española*, 2 vols (Valladolid, 2001), I, 49–56 (pp.54–55).

<sup>42</sup> See Martín Viso, 'Poder político', pp.550–51.

<sup>43</sup> The last mention linked to a royal agent in Tedeja is dated in 1127; *Los Cartularios Gótico y Galicano*, ed. Ruiz de Loizaga, Gótico, doc. 149.



counts means that they were considered as cells of the territorial articulation of the new authority. However, Castilian central power did not possess the means to create these districts, so its aim was the control of some processes and areas in order to insert them in its network.<sup>44</sup> This integration did not mean that all situations were similar, or that all the districts developed an identity as *alfóz*; nor did it mean the general implementation of this pattern. In the areas where supralocal units were stronger, it was generally expedient to include them into the new political construction.<sup>45</sup> The hilltop sites could function as one of the main types of central place on a small scale, but in other areas monasteries could carry out this function.<sup>46</sup>

It is necessary to analyse how the *alfoces* located in districts that initially did not constitute the axis of the formation of Castilian power worked. One of them is Siero, quoted as an *alfóz* in the tenth and eleventh centuries, including a great part of the valley of Rudrón into its territory. The latter area probably lay outside its initial area of activity, so there some small hilltop sites, like Castrillo de Butrón and probably Sedano, were inserted into it. Another very similar case is Alfania, controlling the eastern part of Valderredible — an area without hilltop sites — during the reign of García III (1035–54), when this zone was a frontier area.<sup>47</sup> This expansion came together with a change of the place-name in favour of Paredes Rubias,<sup>48</sup> a modification linked to the construction of the small fortress near the village of Báscones de Ebro.<sup>49</sup> Both examples show how hilltop sites and their territories were bases for the formation of new districts during the implementation of Castilian authority. This involved a new arrangement of the hilltop

<sup>44</sup> This hypothesis can be deduced through some recent studies, such as Álvarez Borge, 'Estructuras'; Escalona Monge, *Sociedad y territorio*; or I. Martín Viso 'Pervivencia'.

<sup>45</sup> See C. Estepa Díez, 'El alfoz castellano en los siglos IX al XII', in *En la España Medieval, IV: Estudios Dedicados al Profesor D. Ángel Ferrari Núñez*, 2 vols (Madrid, 1984), II, 305–41; Álvarez Borge, *Monarquía feudal*, pp.7–54; Escalona Monge, *Sociedad y territorio*, pp.85–184.

<sup>46</sup> A good example is the monastery of Valpuesta. The role of the ecclesiastical centres is well known; see E. Peña Bocos, 'Ecclesia y Monasterium: elementos de ordenación de la sociedad de la Castilla altomedieval', in *Señorío y Feudalismo en la Península Ibérica (siglos XII–XIX)*, ed. E. Sarasa Sánchez and E. Serrano Martín, 4 vols (Zaragoza, 1993), III, 379–98.

<sup>47</sup> *Colección Diplomática San Salvador de Oña*, ed. Álamo, doc. 35 (1048.04.10).

<sup>48</sup> Although the term had appeared in the foundation endowment of San Salvador de Oña, dated 1011, it was more common from the second half of eleventh century. *Burgos*, doc. 34.

<sup>49</sup> R. Bohigas Roldán, 'Fuentes arqueológicas y organización social del espacio en el reino de Castilla', in *Del Cantábrico al Duero*, ed. García de Cortázar, pp.75–121 (p.115).

sites, with fission and hierarchization promoted by central power.<sup>50</sup> The previous balance between residential and defensive areas was broken, and the sites were essentially transformed into fortresses. It is very difficult to detect the defensive structures, because they were probably built of timber, whose remains have not been recognized by archaeologists. The local leaders that exercised domination over communities in the eighth and ninth centuries probably did not develop complex means of extracting large surpluses, so they had to resign themselves to using these simple types of construction. The eleventh- and twelfth-century charters identify some of these old hilltop sites with castles, showing what their main function was in the eyes of the clerks,<sup>51</sup> although stone structures were never erected in many of these sites.

At the same time, a gradual abandonment of many hilltop sites can be traced, with an intermediate phase of use as religious centres, as shown by the excavations carried out at Castros de Lastra (Caranca).<sup>52</sup> Different factors can explain this trend. Once the aristocratic groups were transformed into feudal lords, they laid aside the control of hilltop sites, which had been the centres for some of the socio-political roles of communities. Social power was based on the domination of the peasant working process, the collection of feudal dues and political service to the Castilian king. The effective exercise of the royal power was focussed on some fortresses, such as Término, Tedeja, Piedralada or Aguilar, where an agent of the king was located, the so-called *dominante*, normally an aristocrat, with military and judiciary functions. In addition, the decay of the hilltop settlements must be connected with the gradual process of settlement nucleation, which had, as its main effect, the generalization of the village as a settlement form throughout the region.

Although this trend was general, there are some cases of hilltop sites, such as Ruanales, Medina de Pomar, Moradillo del Castillo or Villalba de Losa, which have survived as villages to the present day. The fact that present-day nuclei lie over the previous sites makes accurate understanding of their medieval phases difficult, but their location forces us to consider them as hilltop settlements — a situation that high medieval sites normally avoid — and some were central places of *alfoces* (Ruanales and Moradillo del Castillo). Be that as it may, early defensive structures disappeared or were replaced in favour of stone walls, as at Medina and

<sup>50</sup> See Escalona, this volume.

<sup>51</sup> It was the case of Berbeia; *Los Cartularios Gótico y Galicano*, ed. Ruiz de Loizaga, Gótico, doc. 136.

<sup>52</sup> F. Sáenz de Urturi, 'Castros de Lastra: XX campaña de excavaciones', *Arkeoikuska* (1993), 53–62.

Villalba, both royal boroughs from the twelfth century. Their survival as simple villages was, however, more common, although the site's survival was sometimes linked with the continuation of a supralocal unit based on the hilltop site until the thirteenth century, above all in those areas removed from the great foci of lordship.

Probably the last reason explains why the hilltop continued to be an important site in the mountain areas. The communities of the southern European highlands have been characterized as very strong and cohesive, allowing the conservation of a settlement pattern that had been abandoned in other areas.<sup>53</sup> Pernía — a mountain district located in the high valley of the river Pisuerga — may stand as a good example to illustrate this situation in northern Castile. In spite of the problems of the archaeological data and the scant early medieval written references, three territories focussed on hilltop sites seem to be revealed: Piedras Negras,<sup>54</sup> Resoba<sup>55</sup> and Tremaya.<sup>56</sup> There were probably another two: Castillería — whose name derives from the word for castle — and Mudá, mentioned as an *alfoz* in the delimitation of the bishopric of Palencia in 1059.<sup>57</sup> All of them controlled narrow stretches of valley, where complementary use of lowlands and uplands can easily be developed. The survival of pre-Roman place-names of some of the central places and villages seems to be connected with a pre-medieval origin. The absence of geo-strategic interests, because there was no important route crossing the district and Pernía was never an area whose control was contested between different

<sup>53</sup> About mountain areas of the Iberian north-west, see M. Fernández Mier, *Génesis del Territorio en la Edad Media: Arqueología del Paisaje y Evolución Histórica en la Montaña Asturiana* (Oviedo, 1999) and J. A. Gutiérrez González, 'Sobre los orígenes de la sociedad asturleonense: aportaciones desde la arqueología del territorio', *Studia Historica: Historia Medieval*, 16 (1998), 173–97.

<sup>54</sup> J. Pérez de Urbel, *Historia del Condado de Castilla*, 3 vols (Madrid, 1945), III, doc. 129bis; J. L. Martín, *Orígenes de la Orden Militar de Santiago (1170–1195)* (Barcelona, 1974), doc. 113. It could be identified with the hilltop site of Peñas Negras, near the village of Arbejal.

<sup>55</sup> Pérez de Urbel, *Historia*, III, doc. 129bis; *Documentación de la catedral de Palencia (1035–1249)*, ed. T. Abajo Martín (Palencia, 1986), docs 82 and 91; Martín, *Orígenes*, doc. 118.

<sup>56</sup> *Colección Documental del Archivo de la Catedral de León, IV (1032–1109)*, ed. J. M. Ruiz Asencio (León, 1990), doc. 952, and Martín, *Orígenes*, doc. 183. The place was probably near Santibáñez de Resoba.

<sup>57</sup> *Documentación de la catedral de Palencia*, ed. Abajo Marín, doc. 9. See also *Colección Diplomática del Monasterio de Sahagún, II (1000–1073)*, ed. M. Herrero de la Fuente (León, 1988), doc. 530. Some historians have thought that there was a castle inside the territory, although its location remains unknown even now.

politics, supports the hypothesis of a communal origin. That idea was reinforced thanks to the presence of a homogeneous royal lordship (*realengo*\*) up to the end of the twelfth century, whereas the local aristocratic elite did not have feudal status. The kings claimed a general dominion over the communities<sup>58</sup> and controlled the activity of some local monasteries under their patronage.<sup>59</sup> The process of feudalization came together with a trend to develop commercial, extensive stock raising in these areas from the thirteenth century. The definitive break in territorial organization must be dated to around 1200, implying an enduring tradition compared with other areas of northern Castile (Fig. 8.5).

This territorial pattern, based on strongly cohesive communities, also appears in other highland areas of northern Castile (Sotoscueva, Valdebodres, Espinosa) and in different areas of the Iberian peninsula. The weak hierarchy among the different hilltop sites, the stability of territories and the absence of a powerful indigenous class of feudal lords explain the highlands' experience. The key might be found in the communities' adaptation to a difficult environment. They chose control of some territories organized around stretches of valley and probably based on seasonal small-scale transhumance and stock raising. This pattern did not need great initial investment but did require the maintenance of strongly cohesive communities to allow the pastures' use by all members and their defence against other groups. This model was very stable because any change could only be made by the integration of other similar systems or by inclusion in a different system. The first possibility was very difficult, because of the inability of local elites to transcend the limits of the communal framework. Thus the status of the elites was connected with the exercise of prestigious social functions and not with the exploitation of large estates, which would require the acquisition of new pasturelands in the hands of other communities.

Finally, although the occupation of hilltop sites was a general phenomenon in northern Castile, it is necessary to emphasize their heterogeneity, which can be summarized as falling into three different patterns: the defensive point created by the communities and associated with a nearby settlement; the defensive area placed on the summit, without any settlement, articulating a valley community in the highlands; and the complex defensive structures begun by a central political

<sup>58</sup> The hilltop sites were identified as royal castles and some taxes would be focussed on them. *Documentación de la catedral de Palencia*, ed. Abajo Martín, docs 48 and 82.

<sup>59</sup> For instance, San Miguel de Infravillas, San Salvador del Monte, San Salvador de Cantamuda and Santa María de Lebanza; *Documentación de la catedral de Palencia*, ed. Abajo Martín, docs 14, 82 and 91.

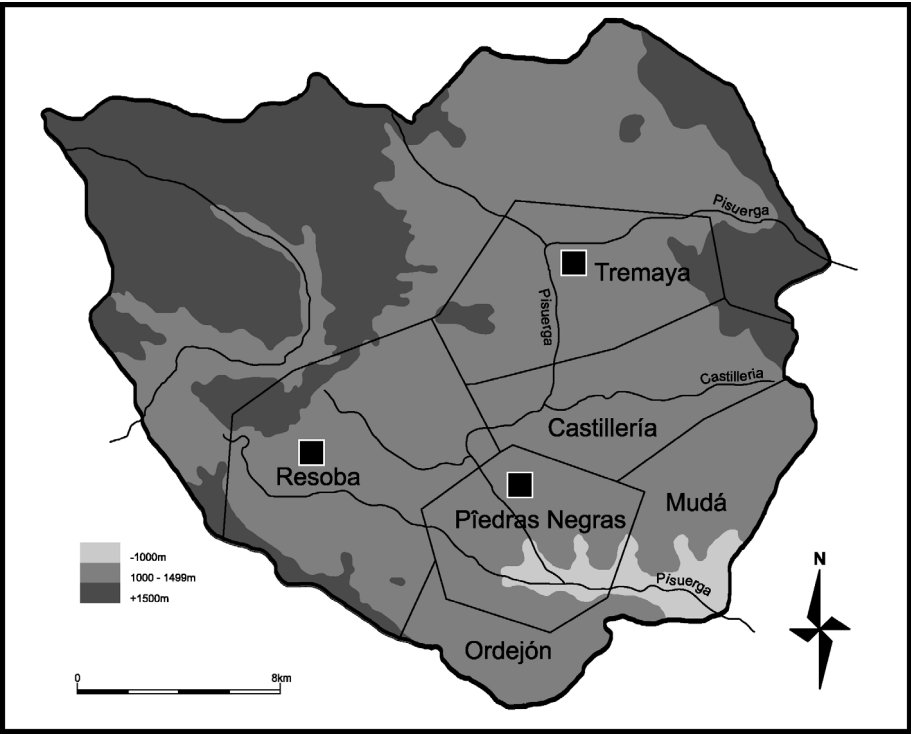


Figure 8.5. Hilltop sites and territories in the district of Pernía.

apparatus, with its residential functions located on the plain. The first two possibilities were the most usual and they implied an initiative by communities. The occupation of the hilltop sites must be connected with the transformation of the social basis of aristocratic groups after the collapse of the Roman system. These changes could take different forms, according to previous regional conditions, and the occupation of hilltop sites in varying forms was their consequence.



## THE ENDING OF THE ROMAN CITY: THE CASE OF CLUNIA IN THE NORTHERN PLATEAU OF SPAIN

Adela Cepas

Several essays in this book deal with areas with a Roman past, areas where early medieval communities emerged from a complex background shaped by the dismantling of the social and political framework provided by Rome and the appearance of new political identities and forms of organization. Investigating the obscure origins of early medieval communities through both the archaeology and the written evidence is a hard but crucial task, as most authors in this volume remark.

In this essay my aim is to suggest that a deeper examination of the relationship between the Roman political framework and the local communities living under it may provide rich insights into the kind of processes from which their early medieval successors took shape. Drawing on the case of Clunia — the Roman capital of the *conventus iuridicus*\* *Cluniensis* in the Spanish northern plateau — I will explore changing political identities and notions of community across the Imperial period with an emphasis on how, and to what extent, the notion of Roman *civitas*\* moulded political identities in Rome's heyday, and how much the ending of this model in the late Roman and sub-Roman periods reveals about alternative social and political aggregations, about, in other words, the meltingpot of early medieval communities.

### *Political Identities Within the Roman Empire: A Fragile World?*

In the Roman Empire ethnic matters were emphatically separated from politics, to the extent that they became completely independent. An individual could keep up everything pertaining to his native people and culture and only be Roman in so far as he was a political being, a citizen. Society was based on civil law, which was seen as an agreement

between members of society aimed at achieving the common good. And this idea of the common good, the *res publica*, came to be considered as being something higher, more important than the ethnic community.<sup>1</sup>

It is worth quoting this lengthy extract since it makes a useful introduction to the plurality of the Roman Empire. The many different peoples at different stages of cultural and political development, the complexity of social and economic relationships, the different religious faiths, and so on, all gathered together into an immense political entity, are a fine example of a multi-ethnic, multicultural and multiconfessional state, under the solid unifying umbrella of *Romanitas*.

There is a relatively widespread opinion that the decadence of the Roman Empire brought with it a return of certain cultural traditions that had existed in the western Roman Empire before the conquest and lived on through the following centuries. Manufacture of certain objects (mainly ceramics, sculpture, metal-work) in pre-Roman style and form seems to have taken place from as early as the second half of the second century, when Rome's political and economic power was at its height. The so-called 'Celtic survival' is not just a feature of Europe's far north. In Spain, pieces such as the slabs set up by the Vadinian community have also been seen as examples of this Roman 'fragility'. These are a set of second- to third-century funerary and votive inscriptions found on both sides of the Cantabrian mountains, across the boundaries of the modern provinces of Asturias and León; neither their form, nor the script, nor the personal names in them fit into the classical format.<sup>2</sup> No wonder that they have been used as examples of how little Romanization really permeated certain indigenous communities.

The three main reasons usually forwarded for the 'Celtic survival' — stimulation by contact with other less Romanized people, economic decline and the increase of nationalism — were all rejected by MacMullen, according to whom this happened just because 'the work of conquerors, remarkable as it certainly was, suffered from a kind of fragility and superficiality which should not be forgotten'.<sup>3</sup>

Certainly, the processes running in the highest spheres need to be counterbalanced with the more varied local realities. It is indeed known that Rome's success stemmed from its ability to govern a vast territory with a relatively elementary

<sup>1</sup> G. Pereira Menaut, 'Formación técnica vs. humanismo: Aproximación crítica', *Revista Mientras Tanto*, 68–69 (1997), 135–48 (pp.144–45).

<sup>2</sup> M<sup>a</sup>. C. González and J. Santos, 'La epigrafía del conventus Cluniense, I: Las estelas vadinienses', *Memorias de Historia Antigua*, 6 (1984), 85–111.

<sup>3</sup> R. MacMullen, 'The Celtic Renaissance', *Historia*, 14 (1965), 93–104 (p.104).



administrative establishment.<sup>4</sup> The army — which not only conquered but was also directly involved in tasks more properly belonging to the work of pacification, administration and exploitation of the territory — together with a small number of civil servants, organized into various ranks depending on the tasks they had to accomplish, were the pillars on which Rome leant to manage its huge empire.<sup>5</sup> But this was not enough to govern and economically exploit a territory and to make a large population pay its taxes. It is agreed that the very key of Roman territorial control was a system of cities, which governed themselves, financed themselves and, in their turn, financed Rome. It is in the cities (*civitates*) that the local population became directly involved.

A city's population comprised both the people living in the town (*urbs*) and those dispersed across the territory (*ager*). The town was not only a political and religious centre where the local *curia*\* lived and met, but also a market and a stronghold of defence. Apart from the urban core, the territory hosted a population of varying legal and social status, scattered in settlements which also varied in terms of type, functionality and position in relation to others; some were of more urban character, like *vici*\*, *pagi*, *fora* (marketplaces) or *mansiones* (road stations), but in the rural areas there was a veritable explosion of new settlements connected with the exploitation of the territory such as *villae*\* (agricultural estates), mining sites and saltpans, pottery workshops and factories. This settlement network was reinforced by a dense pattern of roads connecting the main urban centres in each province that guaranteed political and fiscal control of the conquered population.<sup>6</sup> We need to look into the heart of *civitates* in order to identify those communities that, by being included within the city structures, became integrated in the new political order established by Rome.

<sup>4</sup> Roman administration may seem elementary by modern standards, but it was highly sophisticated if compared with that of its predecessors and successors.

<sup>5</sup> F. Millar, *The Roman Empire and its Neighbours* (London, 1967); F. Millar, *The Emperor in the Roman World, 31 BC – AD 337* (London, 1977); K. Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves* (Cambridge, 1978); H. G. Pflaum, *Les carrières procuratoriennes équestres sous le Haut Empire romain*, 3 vols (Paris, 1961).

<sup>6</sup> P. López Paz, *La Ciudad Romana Ideal*, vol. 1.1: *El territorio* (Santiago de Compostela, 1994); A. Rey Losada, *La Ciudad Romana Ideal*, vol. II: *El grupo poblacional* (Santiago de Compostela, 2003); M. I. Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 2nd edn (London, 1985), pp.177–207; P. Garnsey and R. Saller, *The Roman Empire: Economy, Society, Culture* (London, 1987).

### *Administrative Frameworks and the Territorial Role of Cities in Northern Hispania*

Following the Roman conquest *Hispania* was organized in a three-layered administrative system. The peninsula was divided into three provinces: *Baetica*, *Lusitania* and *Citerior*. The territory of each province was then divided in legal districts (*conventus*), comprising a number of *civitates*; the latter were the units into which local communities were integrated, peacefully so in many cases — since in all probability most communities continued to live in their previous homes — but with a measure of violence wherever Rome forced the population to move from their old settlements in the hills to new ones on the plain, closer to roads and cities.

This system was rearranged and simplified by Diocletian in the late third century. The Iberian Peninsula became part of the *diocesis Hispaniarum*, to which some North African territories were added. Seven provinces were created — *Baetica*, *Lusitania*, *Carthaginensis*, *Callaecia*, *Tarraconensis*, and the African *Mauritania Tingitana*<sup>7</sup> — mainly by splitting into three the huge *Citerior* (Fig. 9.1). The intermediate administrative units — the *conventus* probably — disappeared. These changes mostly affected the upper levels but not the internal workings of the *civitates*.

The fourth century was a haven of peace between the troubled third (especially in its second half) and the even more disturbed fifth century, characterized by the confrontation between the usurper Constantine III and the official emperor Honorius, the intrusion of Sueves, Vandals and Alans in 409, and the Goths' increasing interference in the Iberian peninsula. When Roman rule faded out and the provincial government and the army disappeared, a varied range of cities remained that were left to survive as best they could on their own. Even if Roman administrative structures largely continued throughout the fifth century, as it has been recently argued,<sup>8</sup> urban centres and their territories were in effect the main administrative framework for much of northern Hispania.

Between the first and third centuries AD, Clunia was the capital of one of the intermediate administrative districts in the province *Hispania Citerior*, the *conventus iuridicus Cluniensis*. This was a large district stretching from the

<sup>7</sup> The limits of *Baetica* and *Lusitania* remained practically unchanged. In the rest, the new provincial boundaries obliterated those of the former *conventus*. Moreover, epigraphic mentions of *conventus* and their administrative offices disappear in the fourth century. J. Arce, *El último siglo de la España Romana (274–409)* (Madrid, 1986), pp.31–41.

<sup>8</sup> J. Arce, 'Los gobernadores de la Diocesis Hispaniarum (ss. IV–V d.C.) y la continuidad de las estructuras administrativas romanas en la Península Ibérica', *Antiquité Tardive*, 7 (1999), 73–83.



Figure 9.1. Roads, towns and late provincial divisions in Roman Spain.

eastern side of the modern province of Asturias to Bilbao, and from the Cantabric shore to the Spanish Central mountains. It engulfed a great number of native peoples and settlements of very diverse cultural traditions (Fig. 9.1).

Why Clunia was chosen as the *conventus* capital is far from being fully explained. Although there surely was a native settlement in the vicinity — not yet detected — Roman Clunia was newly founded on top of a prominent 1023 metre-high plateau, in a location relatively detached from the main road network. It was on no communication network. A detour from the main road linking *Asturica* (Astorga) and *Bracara* (Braga) with *Tarraco* (Tarragona) via *Caesaraugusta* (Zaragoza) was built to fit *Clunia* into this pattern. Likewise the city's connections with other major urban centres had to be established thereafter by means of a dense web of secondary roads.<sup>9</sup>

Clunia's archaeological story is a familiar one: a fast urban development in the early empire followed by a late Roman period marked by the change of function

<sup>9</sup> J. A. Abásolo Álvarez, *Las vías romanas de Clunia* (Burgos, 1978).

and/or abandonment of most of its structures. Like most major towns in the Duero plateau,<sup>10</sup> Clunia flourished very rapidly in the first century AD. Its best-known public facilities are a theatre, forum, urban street-plan, two large public baths, and a substantial building of uncertain function near the forum as well as several stately houses (*domus*). Urban development continued at a dynamic pace in the following centuries, with a series of reformations both in the forum and in other areas of the city. By the late empire, though, most of the public buildings had lost their former function. The abundant material culture unearthed by Palol since 1958 is in sharp contrast with the use people made of the city's buildings. Glass and bronze objects, coin hoards spanning the mid-third to fifth centuries, and a mass of pottery have been recovered. The especially abundant Late Hispanic Red Slip Ware is found in the later phases of houses and other buildings, often marking a reuse, rather than normal continued occupation. This happens indistinctively in one of the forum temples, in house number 3, in the small baths by the forum and in the large ones called Los Arcos, where findings of pottery moulds suggest the facilities had been turned into a pottery workshop. Likewise, a fifth- to seventh-century cemetery invaded the urban area east of the forum. After the fifth century Clunia, to be sure, did not look much like the standard Roman city it had once been.<sup>11</sup>

Archaeological material from Clunia spans the whole Roman period with no clear sign of widespread abandonment, but there certainly was a profound change of character between the early and late empire, expressed, among other factors, by a change of attitude in the local elites, who dropped public building construction and maintenance. Similar processes in other towns of central Spain like *Valeria*, *Segobriga*, *Ercavica*, or *Vxama* have usually been explained by reference to the third-century political and economic crisis.<sup>12</sup> In Clunia's case, the ongoing process surely reached a turning point with the late third-century suppression of the *conventus* division, which removed its capital character and downgraded it to the status of a regular city within the new province.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> A. Cepas Palanca, *Crisis y continuidad en la Hispania del siglo III*, Anejos de Archivo Español de Arqueología, 17 (Madrid, 1997), pp.181–86; R. F. J. Jones, 'A False Start? The Roman Urbanization of Western Europe', *World Archaeology*, 19 (1987), 47–57.

<sup>11</sup> P. de Palol, 'Noves dades arqueològiques sobre els darrers segles de Clunia', orig. pub. 1978; repr. in P. de Palol and others, *Clunia 0: Studia Varia Cluniensia* (Burgos, 1991), pp.295–300.

<sup>12</sup> Cepas Palanca, *Crisis y continuidad*, pp.230–31.

<sup>13</sup> P. de Palol, *Clunia: Historia de la ciudad y guía de las excavaciones*, 6th edn (Burgos, 1994), p.140.

Clunia's later phases are poorly understood yet. A Christian community has been hypothesized after a glass bowl with Christian symbols was found back in the 1960s in the reused bath at Los Arcos.<sup>14</sup> This may be connected to the aforesaid sub-Roman cemetery, but no buildings of distinctively religious typology have been detected. Clunia seems to have enjoyed no prominent position in the Visigothic period: no coins were minted there; no textual reference has been preserved. Moreover, it failed to become an episcopal see, which was set in nearby *Vxama Argaela*, as a confirmation of Clunia's loss of status in the late Roman period. There is not much to be said about the early medieval phase. A population may have remained, whether on the city's platform or in the lowlands around it. If so, their location shifted to a lower promontory in the south-west, modern Coruña del Conde. This new location retained the ancient name and a certain notion of territorial centrality. In the tenth century it became the capital of the largest district in the County of Castile and suffered several attacks by the Cordoban Muslim armies.<sup>15</sup>

This sketchy account of Clunia's trajectory should be enough to argue that the striking changes the city underwent across antiquity must have affected its relationships with the territory it controlled and the population living there. Yet community membership and political identities are hard to investigate because of the rock-solid message of city allegiance that stems from the textual records, which nearly always originate in the centre. It is through the interstices of this apparently uncontested discourse of political unanimity that we must proceed.

### *An Epigraphic Exploration of Political Identities in the Clunia Area*

The local populations of Roman times have left their traces in a multitude of mostly private inscriptions which provide us with a host of data such as deity names, kin-groupings, or personal names, as well as a whole web of family relationships left to us mainly on funerary inscriptions. This material is our best available means of getting closer to local political identities.

A massive literature has analysed the connections between the latinization of personal names and changes in the legal status of native individuals and communities, from their initial situation of foreigners (*peregrini*) within the Roman state

<sup>14</sup> P. de Palol, 'Un vidrio tallado, con temas cristianos, de Clunia', in de Palol and others, *Clunia 0*, pp.347–54.

<sup>15</sup> J. Escalona, 'Comunidades, territorios y poder condal en la Castilla del Duero en el siglo X', *Studia Historica: Historia Medieval*, 18–19 (2000–01), 85–120, and his essay in this volume.

to personal or collective promotion. Those who achieved Roman citizenship tended to restyle their native names into a more appropriate, Roman-like format. An early inscription with Latin names probably indicates an individual from outside Hispania whereas, later, more and more natives bear Latin names so the distinction becomes blurred.<sup>16</sup> Most importantly, members of the local elites reinforced their local leadership and strove to join other higher social and political spheres by becoming part of the administration of a city, a juridical district, a province, the army or the Roman state.

The lowest step in this ladder of promotion was the city, but this was far from being a simple environment. Unfortunately, there is no direct evidence we can use to plot the boundaries of first- to third-century Roman *municipia*\* in these areas. Yet the distribution of privileged towns suffices to show that they surely had very large hinterlands. When compared with the regional network of late pre-Roman Iron Age *oppida*\*, the Roman pattern clearly means that only some of them, together with a limited number of new foundations, made it to urban status and developed proper territories. Those communities that failed either disappeared or became lesser status sites (*vici*) embedded in an urban *ager*. The Roman city, therefore, was the centre of a complex system of overlapping ethnic and political identities — kin-groups, urban membership, Roman citizenship — which can be observed in the inscriptions. Let us look at these in detail.

As expressed on inscriptions, native personal names normally feature as a first name plus another in the genitive, recording filiation. Not infrequently a third element is added, often in an adjectival form, more rarely in the genitive plural,<sup>17</sup> which is taken to express belonging to some sort of grouping, whose character is

<sup>16</sup> As regards chronology, we should bear in mind that we are dealing here with the northern part of the Iberian Peninsula where an early inscription usually dates from the change of era (i.e. before and after 1 AD). For the transition from indigenous names to Latin ones, see G. Pereira Menaut and J. Santos Yanguas, 'Sobre la romanización del noroeste de la península Ibérica: las inscripciones con mención de origo personal', *Revista de Guimaraes* (1980), 120–22. For the difficulties associated with learning about people's juridical status through epigraphy, see G. Alföldy, 'Notes sur le droit de cité et la nomenclature dans l'Empire Romain', *Latomus*, 25 (1966), 37–57.

<sup>17</sup> Names ending in the genitive plural refer to a group of people who were related through their father and mother, as documented in the Indo-European area of Spain on Celtiberian *tesserae*, and in inscriptions of the type *Aecus Aploniocum Lougi f(ilius) Cluniensis, Aploniocum* being the name ending in genitive plural. The inscription was found in Lusitania (Alconetar, Cáceres); see M. E. Ramírez Sánchez, *Epigrafía y organización social en la región celtibérica: los grupos de parentesco* (Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 2001), p.413, A.91.

much debated.<sup>18</sup> Terms such as ‘tribal organizations’ and ‘suprafamily organizations’, as well as names ending in the genitive plural, are very widely used in Spanish historiography to describe native social groupings in the Celtic-speaking areas of Iberia as well as in large zones of the north and north-west of the Iberian Peninsula. Native ‘peoples’ — in the broadest and loosest sense of the word — are seen as nested aggregates of smaller, self-defined groupings, normally expressed as *gentes*, which in turn may engulf other *gentes*.

Now, these terms probably refer to kin relationships (*cognationes*\*). Their physical dimension is uncertain. A relationship has been put forward, mainly for the Galician far north-west, between names in the genitive and *castella*\* (hill forts) to suggest that kin-groups could also be residential units.<sup>19</sup> Yet kin networks may be perfectly operative social structures without a residential character. They may constitute forms of non-territorial community bonds, spreading across several settlements and territories, to which some of their members belong as part of the local population. A flexible approach seems preferable after growing criticism eroded the established image of native pre-Roman societies as ‘tribal’, egalitarian, kin-based organizations, in favour of a more sophisticated combination of kin-based links with a greater political and economic complexity, and some degree of class differentiation.<sup>20</sup>

Clunia lay in the area of the *Arevaci*, a pre-Roman people belonging to Celtiberia.<sup>21</sup> The (mostly funerary) Latin inscriptions from Clunia, dated to the first century AD or, at the very latest, the beginning of the second record people who expressed ascription to a group of the kind expressed by native names in the genitive plural, although the former amount to just five references out of a total

<sup>18</sup> M. C. González Rodríguez, *Las unidades organizativas indígenas en el área indoeuropea de la Península Ibérica* (Vitoria, 1986); F. Beltrán Lloris, ‘Un espejismo historiográfico: Las organizaciones gentilicias hispanas’, in *I Congreso Peninsular de Historia Antigua (Santiago de Compostela, 1986)*, ed. G. Pereira Menaut, 3 vols (Santiago de Compostela, 1988), II, 197–237 (pp. 218–29); M. Salinas de Frías, ‘Sobre las formas de propiedad comunal de la cuenca del Duero en época prerromana’, *Veleia*, 6 (1989), 103–10; J. Santos Yanguas, ‘1985–1994: Un decenio fructífero en la investigación de las estructuras sociales indígenas del área indoeuropea’, *Veleia*, 12 (1995), 125–49.

<sup>19</sup> M. L. Albertos Firmat, ‘Organizaciones suprafamiliares en la Hispania Antigua’, *Studia Archaeologica*, 37 (1975), 5–66.

<sup>20</sup> F. Burillo Mozota, *Los Celtíberos: Etnias y estados* (Barcelona, 1998).

<sup>21</sup> Pliny, *Natural History*, III.27, in *Naturalis Historia*, ed. C. Mayhoff (Leipzig, 1906): *Clunia Celtiberiae finis*; J. M<sup>a</sup>. Gómez Fraile, ‘Celtiberia en las fuentes grecolatinas: Replanteamiento conceptual de un paradigma obsoleto’, *Polis*, 8 (1996), 143–206.

220 pieces.<sup>22</sup> Even individuals who enjoyed Roman citizenship sometimes recorded this ascription, with no apparent interference between this private display and the *ius civile*,<sup>23</sup> as in the case of *L. Valerius C.f. Gal(eria) Crescens Bundalico(rum)*.<sup>24</sup> Similar data can be found in the nearby town of *Nova Augusta* (Lara de los Infantes),<sup>25</sup> whose large epigraphic collection seems to span from the late first century to the middle of the third, with a particularly splendid period between 130 and 200 AD.<sup>26</sup>

So it seems that for local people, who were buried in Clunia or its immediate vicinity, it was fit to record that they belonged to one of those groupings, whatever their character. Now, when it comes to political identities, what they all had in common was their belonging to a *civitas*. This becomes apparent when we can see people acting away from home. Local citizenship imposed itself on the collective mentality of the native peoples to such an extent that when physically outside the *civitas* territory, their belonging to a particular native grouping ceased to be a valid designation. For example, a detailed analysis of inscriptions from Asturias,<sup>27</sup> in northern Spain, shows that if an individual died, or dedicated a votive inscription, within his *civitas* territory, only the group-membership was expressed. If, on the other hand, he died outside the *civitas* territory, both the grouping and the *origo*

<sup>22</sup> Ramírez Sánchez, *Epigrafía y organización social*, p.327, A.32: *Aeggu(m)*; p.325, A.33: *Bundalico(rum)*; p.327, A.34: *Morcicum Aquilliorum*; p.328, A.36: *Usseiticu(m)*, always in a funerary context.

<sup>23</sup> G. Pereira Menaut, 'Cognatio Magilancum: Una forma de organización indígena de la Hispania indoeuropea', in *Actas del V Coloquio sobre Lenguas y Culturas Prerromanas de la Península Ibérica*, ed. J. Untermann and F. Villar (Salamanca, 1993), pp.411–24 (pp.423–24).

<sup>24</sup> 'Lucius Valerius Crescens son of Gaius of the voting tribe Galeria of the Bundalico(rum)', with the same Celtiberic ending in genitive plural but now in Latin: Ramírez Sánchez, *Epigrafía y organización social*, p.325, A.33; P. de Palol and J. Vilella, *Clunia II: La Epigrafía de Clunia* (Madrid, 1987), no. 217.

<sup>25</sup> H. Gimeno and M. Mayer, 'Una propuesta de identificación epigráfica: Lara de los Infantes / Nova Augusta', *Chiron*, 23 (1993), 313–21; Ramírez Sánchez, *Epigrafía y organización social*, p.327, A.26: *Allicon*; p.318, A.27: *Belvicon*; p.319, A.28: *Cabuecon*; p.321, A.29: *Caelaon*; p.322, A.30: *Elaesic(um)*; p.324, A.31: *Moenic(u)m*.

<sup>26</sup> J. A. Abásolo Álvarez, 'Las estelas decoradas de la región de Lara de Los Infantes: Estudio Iconográfico', *Boletín del Seminario de Arte y Arqueología de la Universidad de Valladolid*, 43 (1977), 61–90.

<sup>27</sup> G. Pereira Menaut, and J. Santos Yanguas, 'Ensayo de sistematización de la epigrafía romana de Asturias: Las unidades gentilicias', *Boletín del Instituto de Estudios Asturianos*, 105–106 (1982), 87–110.



(*civitas* of provenance) were recorded. Moreover, for Roman citizens who died away from their homeland, only the *civitas* of origin was noted down; no native grouping was needed.

Likewise, in the inscriptions from Clunia, references to *Clunienses* as Clunian citizens only occur when related to officials of the provincial or colonial administration, as in a fragment of a bronze plaque containing two lines of a first-century AD *tabula patronatus*\* that reads [— *Cluniens*]es ex *H(ispania) C(iteriore)*.<sup>28</sup> Also, a *tabula patronatus* which has been preserved whole records that in 40 AD the *Clunienses ex Hispania Citeriore* made an agreement of hospitality (*hospitium*\*) with *C(aius) Terentius Bassus C(aii) f(ilius) Fab(ia) Mefanas Etruscus praefectus ala Augusta* together with his sons and heirs, formalized by two Clunian delegates.<sup>29</sup> And in 222 AD, in a *tabula patronatus* in bronze, found in Rome in 1776, the *Concilium Conventus Cluniensis* adopted *G(aius) M(arius) P(udens) Cornelianus leg(atus) leg(ionis) c(larissimus) v(ir)* as patron (*patronus*\*).<sup>30</sup> Private documents with a public dimension also mention the *civitas*, as the dedication of a *servus*\* (slave) of the *res publica* (city) of Clunia to the *numen* (deity) of the city theatre, found on the site of the theatre, or the fragments of a marble plaque in which someone, probably a freedman of Hadrian's, honours the *T(utelae) Colon(iae) Cluniensium*.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup> 'Clunienses that form part of the Province of Hispania Citerior'. This fragment was found in the forum, in the same sector where two other similar fragments appeared (nos 113 and 114), possibly all of them from a single bronze plaque on which, according to the publishers, Clunia's municipal laws may have been inscribed; de Palol and Vilella, *Clunia II*, no. 115.

<sup>29</sup> 'Gaius Terentius Bassus Mefanas Etruscus son of Gaius of the voting-tribe Fabia, prefect of the *ala Augusta*': de Palol and Vilella, *Clunia II*, no. 116. A. D'Ors, *Epigrafía Jurídica de la España romana* (Madrid, 1953), p.373, no. 21, interprets this as meaning that the agreement was made between the Clunians and a specific individual and his heirs. The tablet, which is well preserved, measures 38 x 28 x 0.5 cm and was found by a ploughman in the ruins of Clunia in 1887. The tablet has a hole in each of its four corners so that it could have been hung on a wall, probably within the precincts of the forum. The *Ala Augusta* was stationed in the Iberian Peninsula; cf. P. Le Roux, *L'armée romaine et l'organisation des provinces ibériques d'Auguste à l'invasion de 409* (Paris, 1982), pp.90–91.

<sup>30</sup> 'The Council of the *Conventus Cluniensis* adopts Gaius Marius Pudens Cornelianus commander of a legion, *clarissimus vir*, as patron': de Palol and Vilella, *Clunia II*, no. 117; *CIL*, vi, 1454; D'Ors, *Epigrafía Jurídica*, p.377, no. 27, suggests that the tablet was found in Rome because the patron concerned probably lived there.

<sup>31</sup> 'The tutelary goddess of the *colonia* of Clunians': de Palol and Vilella, *Clunia II*, nos 21 and 22 respectively. Inscription no. 22 came to light in a building along with columns, perhaps a temple dedicated to Isis, since a statue of this goddess appeared next to this inscription.

By contrast, no private individuals styled themselves Clunians when having a funerary or votive inscription put up within the city territory. Those who did express their *origo* were foreigners who died away from their homeland. Thus, *Aius Antonius* dedicated a funerary inscription to his wife *Attua Boutia* daughter of *Boutius* from *Intercatia* who died in Clunia, far away from her own city, *Intercatia*.<sup>32</sup> Similar cases include a person from *Vindeleia*,<sup>33</sup> or a freed woman from *Caesaraugusta*,<sup>34</sup> or two veterans from *Emerita* and *Caesaraugusta*.<sup>35</sup> In an altar dedicated to the Matres *Brigeaegis* by *L. Aelius Phainus*, the city name features as an adjective to the deity's name,<sup>36</sup> which surely also applies in the case of a similar dedication to the Matres *Endeiteris*.<sup>37</sup> Conversely, when dying or worshipping their gods away from their place of origin, the Clunians represented themselves as members of their *civitas*, and they expressed their *origo* accordingly. This is particularly clear in a somewhat homogeneous group of funerary slabs found in *Vicus Spacorum* (modern Vigo, in south-western Galicia) and dated to the second century AD onwards.<sup>38</sup> Text-structure, iconography and ornamentation all point to people coming from outside Roman *Callaecia*, or the *conventus Lucensis*, to which *Vicus Spacorum* belonged. Three members of a family can be identified who state their *origo* as Clunian. *Aurelia Materna* dedicated a slab to her husband *Quintus Arrius Mansuetus* son of *Geneus* from *Clunia* who died in *Vicus Spacorum* aged forty (no. 39). The dead man's name has the typical structure of Roman names, with the patronymic in the genitive — *Cn(aei filius)* — between the *praenomen* *Quintus*, the *nomen* *Arrius* and the *cognomen* *Mansuetus*, all followed by the *origo* *Cluniensis*. Probably this *Quintus Arrius Mansuetus* is the same as the one who appears dedicating another slab to his mother *Attilia Ammio* daughter of *Gaius* from *Clunia*, who died in the same place at the age of seventy (no. 40). The dead woman's native name is set out in a format close to the

<sup>32</sup> De Palol and Vilella, *Clunia II*, no. 36. *Intercatia*, a town of *Vaccae* was within the *conventus* of Clunia; cf. TIR, K-30, Madrid, s.v. 'Intercatia'.

<sup>33</sup> De Palol and Vilella, *Clunia II*, no. 218: a funerary inscription, now lost. *Vindeleia*, a town of *Autrigones* was within the *conventus* of Clunia; cf. TIR, K-30, Madrid, s.v. 'Vindeleia'.

<sup>34</sup> De Palol and Vilella, *Clunia II*, no. 35.

<sup>35</sup> De Palol and Vilella, *Clunia II*, nos 61 and 102.

<sup>36</sup> De Palol and Vilella, *Clunia II*, no. 12. The town of *Brigaecini* belongs to *Conventus Asturum*; cf. TIR, K-30, Madrid, s.v. 'Brigaecium'.

<sup>37</sup> De Palol and Vilella, *Clunia II*, nos 13–14.

<sup>38</sup> G. Baños Rodríguez, *Corpus de Inscripciones romanas de Galicia*, vol. II: *Provincia de Pontevedra* (Santiago, 1994), pp.101–65.

standard Roman name structure: a twofold personal name plus an abbreviated affiliation, *C(ai) f(ilia)*. Perhaps this *Q(uintus) Arrius Mi(—)* belonged to the same family. He dedicated a funerary inscription to his wife Valeria Alla daughter of Titus from Clunia who died in the same place at the age of twenty (no. 48). In this case, the dead woman's name is half way between the indigenous and the Roman structure, being composed of two elements, an affiliation and the *origo*.

The people who commissioned those slabs all expressed their provenance from Clunia. By comparison with other slabs from the same place, it has been suggested that this group bears witness to a community of *Cluniensis* living in Vigo.<sup>39</sup> Although the raw material was local granite, the slabs show a remarkable similarity to others from Clunia and Lara:<sup>40</sup> large stone blocks rectangular in shape and rounded at the top; the epigraphic field is located lower down the stone, which is crowned by a semi-circular space, outlined with decorative fluting. According to the editors, 'the typology of the Vigo slabs is clearly related to Galician-Roman slabs; they were made by Galician-Roman craftsmen for a group of people with different and more refined tastes. The Clunians brought their own epigraphic design; they adopted the Galician-Roman type of monument while impressing their own style upon it.'<sup>41</sup>

In *Vicus Spacorum*, we have a group of immigrants from Clunia in the far end of *Callaecia*. They were not the only ones. Some inscriptions from the town of *Capera*, far away in the province of *Lusitania*,<sup>42</sup> mention *Clunienses*;<sup>43</sup> one is particularly detailed: *C. Caelius Pater/nu(s) Gal(eria) Cluniensis / an(norum) XXV H(ic) S(itus) E(st) S(it) T(ibi) / T(erra) L(evis) Vicinia Cluniensium F(aciendum) C(urauit)*.<sup>44</sup> The *vicinia Cluniensium* placed and paid for an epitaph for a Roman

<sup>39</sup> One of the slabs (no. 42) bears no mention of the dead person's origin, but the **formula** \**peregr{a}e* indicates a foreign resident, an alien (*peregrinus*) who died away from home.

<sup>40</sup> J. A. Abásolo Álvarez, *Epigrafía romana de la región de Lara de los Infantes* (Burgos, 1974).

<sup>41</sup> Baños Rodríguez, *Corpus de Inscripciones romanas de Galicia*, pp.352–53. This demonstrates that epigraphic usages obey deeper historical conventions than the simple fashions offered by travelling workshops.

<sup>42</sup> J. Gómez-Pantoja, 'Historia de dos ciudades: Capera y Clunia', in *Économie et territoire en Lusitanie romaine*, ed. J.-G. Gorges and F. Rodríguez Martín, Collection de la Casa de Velázquez, 65 (Madrid, 1999), pp.91–108.

<sup>43</sup> *CIL*, II, 818–20 and 822.

<sup>44</sup> 'C. Caelius Paternus, of the voting-tribe Galeria, Clunian of 25 years. He lies here, may the earth lie lightly upon you. The *vicinia* of Clunians took care of erecting it (the epitaph)': *CIL*, II, 821. Hübner interpreted *vicinia* as a personal name.

citizen from Clunia, who had died at *Capera*. The meaning of the word *vicinia* in this context is uncertain; it might be interpreted as a town quarter, a *vicus*, village or hamlet, but, whatever the meaning, it points to a community of immigrants from Clunia.

### *A Glimpse of Local Communities Below the City Level*

We have seen so far that the discourse of *civitas* membership, as expressed in both official and private inscriptions, dominated what little evidence we have of how political identities worked at a local scale. The city was explicitly represented in recorded official acts. Conversely it never featured as an attribute of the local population while in Clunia, but was stated for those acting away from their city. The implication is that, except for foreigners or passers-by, within the territory of Clunia, the only accepted political denomination was the city itself, which need not be expressed. This leaves us with the problem of the native groupings. If they were taken to mean lesser local communities we could perhaps have a second layer of community membership, but this is far from certain. It seems rather that those terms referred to different, non-territorial kinds of social ties. Mention of those native terms in the inscriptions does not seem to have competed with the city's in terms of political identities. City membership remained the only one that mattered.

This is what the powerful discourse of social unanimity emanating from the Roman municipal system proclaimed. Now, is that everything that existed by way of political identities? The last inscription I would like to discuss seems to tell a different story. This is a fragment of a bronze tablet measuring 13.8 x 14.7 cm found in the village of Peralejos de los Escuderos (Soria). The piece originally had a moulding fixed to the frame, of which only the left-hand side remains. The holes for the nails, which must have fixed it to the wall, possibly in the forum of *Termes*, are preserved in the frame. Its somewhat irregular script has been dated to the second century AD. The inscription<sup>45</sup> runs as follows: — / [—] ADIT[u et /

<sup>45</sup> First published by A. D'Ors, 'Un nuevo dato para la historia de la llamada Termancia', in *Estudios dedicados a Menéndez Pidal*, 3 vols (Madrid, 1951), II, 567–81, and *Epigrafiya Jurídica*, p.375, no. 25; *Année Épigraphique* (1953), no. 267, whose reading I follow; A. Jimeno, *Epigrafiya romana de Soria* (Soria, 1980), pp.160–61, no. 133; L. A. Curchin, 'Vici and Pagi in Roman Spain', *Revue d'Etudes Anciennes*, 87 (1985), 327–43 (p. 331, no. 11); F. Beltrán Lloris, 'Una variante provincial del *hospitium*: pactos de hospitalidad y concesión de la ciudadanía local en la Hispania Tarraconense', in *Epigrafiya y Sociedad en Hispania durante el Alto Imperio: estructuras*



Photo 9.1. The inscription from Peralejo de los Escuderos (Soria).

Photo: Museo Arqueológico Nacional, Madrid, Spain.

*omnibus suis · ornament[is] populo · Termestino d(e) · s(ua) · p(ecunia) /<sup>5</sup> f(aciendum) · c(urauerunt) · Dercinoassedensibus / vicanis · Cluniensium lib(eris) · posterisque · eorum se/natus · populusque · Termestin/us · concessit · ut · eodem · iure es/<sup>10</sup> sent · Termes · quo · ciues · Term/estini · IIIuiris · L(ucio) · Licinio · Pilo / M(arco) · Terentio · Celso · L(ucio) · Pompeio / V(itulo) · T(ito) · Pompeio / Raro.<sup>46</sup>*

There are four parts to the text. The first, which has been lost, would have given the consular date as occurs in some documents of this kind. The second,

*y relaciones sociales (Madrid-Alcalá de Henares, 2000)*, ed. S. Armani, B. Hurllet-Martineau and A. U. Stylow, *Acta Complutensia*, 4 (Alcalá, 2003) pp.35–62 (p.44).

<sup>46</sup> '(The Dercinoassedenses) took care of having built and paid for at their own expenses (some public work with an entry? and) all its ornaments for the People of Termes. The Senate and the People of Termes granted the Dercinoassesenses, who lived in a *vicus* that belonged to the city of Clunia, to their children and coming generations, the same law, whenever they were in the territory of the city of Termes, of the citizens of Termes. (Signed by) L. Licinius Pilus, M. Terentius Celsus, L. Pompeius Vitulus (and) T. Pompeius Rarus, members of the body of the four magistrates.'

partially missing, describes some type of work, perhaps public, that the *Dercinoassedenses* had financed for the city of *Termes*.<sup>47</sup> In the third, it is stated that the Senate and the People of the city of *Termes* have conceded to the *Dercinoassedsensibus* themselves and their descendents to have the same law of the citizens of *Termes* whenever they were in the territory of the *civitas* of *Termes*. Finally, the document is validated with the names of the four magistrates, surely from *Termes*.

Usually this text has been interpreted as if the local citizenship had been granted to be enjoyed anywhere at anytime. There are three references to *Termes* and to the *cives termestini*. The first (line 8) refers to the Senate and the People; the second (lines 8–9) to the law of the city; and between them (beginning of line 8) is a third mention: *Termes*. I think that the latter could be interpreted as a locative (not declinable) referring to the time and space in which local citizenship could be used: only while in the territory of the *civitas* of *Termes*. Therefore, the locative *Termes* must have been used to express the terms in which the agreement could be enforced;<sup>48</sup> otherwise this third reference would have been redundant.<sup>49</sup>

*Termes*, an Arevacan city like *Clunia*, lies some 50 km to its south (Fig. 9.2). The inscription was found in a modern village 5 km south-east from *Termes*, which suggests that it very probably was carried there from the city ruins. We do not know whether the *Dercinoassedenses* paid for the building of some public work in *Termes* and as a result were welcomed into the city on equal legal terms as their citizens or if things happened the other way around, but the order of the document suggests that the initiative came from the first party. In whichever case, the text records a treaty or agreement between two communities, *cives* and *vicani*, which was settled on juridical terms, signed by the magistrates and put on the wall of a public building, as was the custom in Roman towns. Although we only have one copy of the document, possibly the one kept in *Termes*, the other party very probably also had its own.

Unfortunately, the *vicus Dercinoassedensis* only occurs in this text, and its location is unknown; however there is some evidence to help pin it down on a map of pre-Roman Celtiberia. The term *Dercinos* is Celtiberic. While the genitive *Asedi* appears on an inscription from the Lisbon area, its first part recalls a personal

<sup>47</sup> Public works that D'Ors, *Epigrafía Jurídica*, p.376, suggests as being public baths.

<sup>48</sup> D'Ors, *Epigrafía Jurídica*, p. 375, corrected *Termes* by the genitive (?) *Termis*. Jimeno, *Epigrafía romana de Soria*, p.160, translates it as 'belonging to *Termes* (with the same law as the citizens of *Termes*)'; and Beltrán Lloris thinks that the term seems to be not declinable, 'Una variante provincial del *hospitium*', p.44, n. 28.

<sup>49</sup> Scribal mistakes are frequently attested on inscriptions, but less so in texts of this nature.

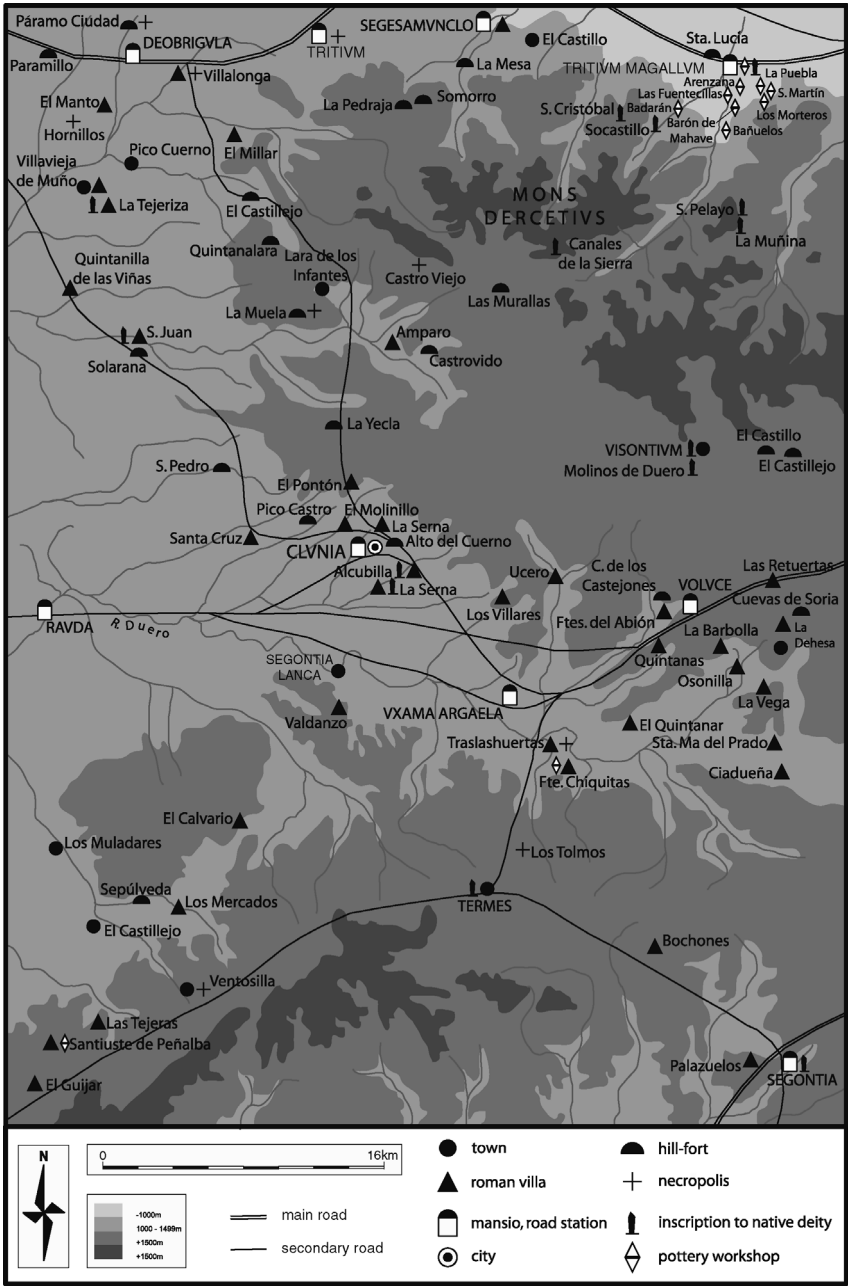


Figure 9.2. Detail of the Clunia area (after TIR, K-30, Madrid).

name, *Dercinos* — *terkinos* in the Iberic writing — five times mentioned in one of the bronze plaques of Botorrita (Teruel);<sup>50</sup> it also bears some similarity with the place-name *Dercenna*, located by Martial<sup>51</sup> in the Celtiberic region of Bilbilis and with a native divinity called *Dercetius*, recorded in a second-century votive inscription from near modern San Millán de la Cogolla.<sup>52</sup> *Dircetius* seems to be a mountain name that later passed on to the monastery of San Millán de la Cogolla, occasionally named *Dercensis* until the tenth century.<sup>53</sup>

Now, wherever it lay, what is most remarkable in this text is that one of the parties was a *vicus* of Clunia, thus a lesser settlement subordinated to it, but it was able to act legally in a perfectly autonomous fashion in no less a matter than negotiating a second citizenship with another community of a higher rank, a *civitas*. Moreover, it had control of its own finances, thus coming close to a *res publica*. All this suggests an almost urban character, even if under the cover of the *civitas* of Clunia.<sup>54</sup>

The inscription says nothing about why these *vicani* would pay to be treated on legally equal terms with the *cives termestini*, or what it meant to be subjected to the same rights and obligations (*munera*).<sup>55</sup> On the other hand, the relationship established between them is not of the type usually shown on a *tessera*\* *hospitalis* or a *tabula patronatus* not only because the usual words, *hospitium* or *patronatus*, do not appear (at least not in the preserved text) but also because of the content

<sup>50</sup> F. Beltrán Lloris and others, *El tercer bronce de Botorrita (Contrebia Belaisca)* (Zaragoza, 1996); Beltrán Lloris, 'Una variante provincial del *hospitium*', p.44, n. 29. The *Celtiberi* took the semi-syllabic writing from the eastern *Iberi* as a means of expressing their own Celtic language; as the Roman power gained strength they moved to Latin.

<sup>51</sup> Martial, *Epigramas*, ed. M. Dolç (Barcelona, 1949–50), I. 49.

<sup>52</sup> Found at San Cristóbal on the slopes of Monte Castillo. M<sup>a</sup>. L. Albertos, 'El Culto a los montes entre los Galaicos, Astures y Berones y algunas de las deidades más significativas', *Estudios de Arqueología Alavesa*, 6 (1974), 47–157; U. Espinosa Ruiz, *Epigrafía romana de la Rioja* (Logroño, 1986), pp.59–60, no. 40; TIR, K-30, Madrid, s.v. 'San Cristóbal (San Millán de la Cogolla)'.

<sup>53</sup> Sancti Braulonis Caesaragustanis Episcopi, *Vita Sancti Emiliani*, ed. L. Vázquez de Parga (Madrid, 1943), p.16. The area of San Millán de la Cogolla — where the Roman inscription and the seventh-century place-name are documented — is near to the Sierra de la Demanda, the likely boundary between the *conventus* of *Clunia* and *Caesaraugusta*.

<sup>54</sup> Already pointed out by Beltrán Lloris, 'Una variante provincial del *hospitium*', p.44, and by Curchin, 'Vici and Pagi', p.335.

<sup>55</sup> G. Pereira Menaut, 'Che cos'è un munus?', *Athenaeum*, 1 (2004), 169–215.



of the text itself.<sup>56</sup> Either they were often present in the city of *Termes* — whether for a long stay or just passing through its territory<sup>57</sup> — or there was a stable community of immigrants there, as was the case of Clunians in *Vicus Spacorum* or *Capera*.<sup>58</sup>

Roman inscriptions from Spain sparingly reveal hints of *vici*, *pagi* and *castella* somehow acting in an autonomous fashion.<sup>59</sup> Surely the reality of local politics operated in ways rather different from those that the discourse emanated from major power centres would have us envisage. The very presence of such communities of sub-urban rank is a fine reminder that the Roman cities were no more a resource for the Roman administration to control its realm than a device by which urban — mainly native — elites reinforced their control over an enlarged territory. This surely could not happen without conflict at the local level, but we hardly ever see traces of it.

Nevertheless, such a system of local domination could not stay unaltered across the changes that affected the region's Roman towns from the third century. The dramatic changes evidenced in Clunia's archaeological record probably point to parallel developments in its hinterland. In this respect, the archaeological visibility of the different kinds of sites may well have misled scholars to compare the decline in urban structures to the splendour of rural villa-sites. This may be a false equa-

<sup>56</sup> Generally the Latin *tesserae* and pacts of hospitality and patronage found in Spain sanction individual agreements between two parties: Romans and provincials; or a city and a person who is granted the local citizenship; or two Roman towns. It is worth noting that these sorts of documents are only found in Italy, Spain and North Africa; F. Beltrán Lloris, 'La hospitalidad celtibérica: una aproximación desde la epigrafía latina', *Palaeohispanica*, 1 (2001), 35–62, and F. Beltrán Lloris, 'Los pactos de hospitalidad de la Hispania Citerior: una valoración histórica', in *La Península Ibérica hace 2000 años*, ed. L. Hernández Guerra, L. Sagredo San Eustaquio and J. M<sup>a</sup>. Solana Sáinz (Valladolid, 2001), pp.393–99.

<sup>57</sup> In search of pasture lands, as suggested by J. Gómez-Pantoja, 'Pastio agrestis: Pastoralismo en Hispania romana', in *Los rebaños de Gerión: Pastores y trashumancia en Iberia antigua y medieval*, ed. J. Gómez-Pantoja, Collection de la Casa de Velázquez, 73 (Madrid, 2001), pp.177–213. E. Haley, *Migration and Economy in Roman Spain* (Barcelona, 1991), p.106, thinks that economic reasons of uncertain nature led them to look for links with the people of *Termes*.

<sup>58</sup> There are other places where Clunienses — as well as Uxamenses — appear. Of the seven hundred inscriptions found in Iberia mentioning foreigners, those pertaining to these two cities constitute an eighth of the total and there are more than twice as many as those from any other place, Haley, *Migration and Economy*, pp.87–88.

<sup>59</sup> Curchin, 'Vici and Pagi'; P. Le Roux, 'Vicus et castellum en Lusitanie sous l'Empire', *Studia Historica: Historia Antigua*, 10–11 (1992–93), 151–60.

tion. The case of Clunia may be better explained by pointing out that, from the start, the city's prominence was largely based on the position it was granted within the Roman administrative network. Without the latter, it seems to have lapsed back among its peer settlements, even losing out to *Vxama* in the competition to be an episcopal see in the Visigothic period.

More importantly, the city's decline may well have meant a decrease in its ability to hold control of a territory where, as we have seen, other forms of political allegiance existed, but rarely emerged from below the cover of the centrally enforced discourse of local citizenship. The case of the *vicus Dercinoassensis* (even if we cannot locate it) may parallel other developments in the archaeological record. All across the east of the Duero plateau there is a repeated pattern of **hilltop sites**\* which were occupied in the late Iron Age but have no early Roman phase. Many of them, though, were reoccupied in the late empire, often in the late fourth century, that is, before the collapse of Roman authority and the beginning of the fifth-century invasions. There are a number of such sites in Clunia's vicinity, and probably more are to be discovered in the future. Sites as La Yecla, Peña de Nuestra Señora (surrounds of La Yecla), El Castillo, El Castillejo, Cabeza de San Vicente (surrounds of Castrovido), etc. fit within this pattern.<sup>60</sup>

The reoccupation of old native hilltop sites is yet ill understood, but it should be ascribed neither to a 'Celtic revival' nor to random selection of prominent locations that just happened to have a pre-Roman phase. The evidence discussed in this essay suggests that, below the layer of urban territories and government, lesser communities existed throughout the Roman period<sup>61</sup> whose visibility was largely blocked off by the centre's prominent material culture and political discourse. Their material structures, as well as their relationship to both old hill-fort sites and rural villa-sites, still awaits investigation. The possibility that their archaeo-

<sup>60</sup> J. A. Abásolo, and R. García Rozas, *Carta arqueológica de la provincia de Burgos: Partido judicial de Salas de los Infantes* (Burgos, 1980), pp.29–30; J. Escalona Monge, *Sociedad y territorio en la Alta Edad Media Castellana: La formación del alfoz de Lara*, British Archaeological Reports, International Series, 1079 (Oxford, 2002), pp.53–54.

<sup>61</sup> All the inscriptions discussed in this essay are dated to the first and early second centuries on the basis of palaeographic and stylistic characteristics and the internal structure of the texts. However, the 'epigraphic habit' of Romans and provincial as defined by MacMullen ('The Epigraphic Habit in the Roman Empire', *American Journal of Philology*, 103 (1982), 233–46) seems to come to an end by the mid-third century (S. Mrozek, 'À propos de la répartition chronologique des inscriptions latines dans le Haut-Empire', *Epigraphica*, 35 (1973), 114).

logical emergence was just another factor in the process of urban decline and territorial fragmentation should also be considered.

If confirmed, this would not only provide an interesting insight into the long-term evolution of settlement patterns and local communities between the Roman and early medieval period, but also a deeper historical background for the processes of early community formation investigated in other essays in this volume.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>62</sup> See especially Martín Viso and Halsall, this volume. I am very grateful to José Joaquín Caerols (Universidad Complutense, Madrid), Armin Stylow and Helena Gimeno (Centro CIL II, Universidad de Alcalá, Madrid) for their help with the interpretation of some inscriptions. Also to Julio Escalona (CSIC, Madrid) for reading and commenting on an earlier draft. This essay was written during a fellowship granted by the Comunidad Autónoma de Madrid.



## VILLAS, TERRITORIES AND COMMUNITIES IN MEROVINGIAN NORTHERN GAUL

Guy Halsall

**T**his essay confronts the definition of the Merovingian villa: how the villa functioned within local politics, and how it worked in relationships between insiders and outsiders. Revisiting the archaeological and documentary data from the Merovingian region of Metz discussed in a previous monograph (Fig. 10.1),<sup>1</sup> it attempts to refine earlier hypotheses in the light of more recent archaeological work in this area and elsewhere in Gaul and the post-imperial West.

### *The Villa*

#### **The Roman Villa**

In documentary sources, a *villa*\* is generally a country house, a country seat or a farm.<sup>2</sup> The term *fundus* is more usual for an estate, and it has been suggested that the use of *villa* to mean *fundus* was a late antique development.<sup>3</sup> Archaeologically,

<sup>1</sup> G. Halsall, *Settlement and Social Organization: The Merovingian Region of Metz* (Cambridge, 1995). The research for this monograph was completed in mid-1993 and a number of important works published in 1992–93 were not yet available to me.

<sup>2</sup> Where the word ‘villa’ is placed in italics I refer to its technical usage in contemporary documents. Elsewhere, I have, for clarity, coined terms such as ‘villa-community’ and ‘villa-region’ to distinguish them from each other and from the actual buildings of the villa proper.

<sup>3</sup> G. Ripoll and J. Arce, ‘The Transformation and End of Roman *villae* in the West (Fourth–Seventh Centuries): Problems and Perspectives’, in *Towns and their Territories between*

I shall understand a *villa* to be a residence that was a visible focus for the expenditure of surplus extracted by its owner, constructed to Roman or *Romanizing* stylistic norms. We need not assume that the villa was necessarily the dwelling of the owner of the directly surrounding lands — that an estate belonging to the villa immediately adjoined it. Surplus could have been extracted elsewhere or by other means. Nor need we assume that, where it *was*, the landowner necessarily dwelt in the villa most or all of the time. That said, I shall assume that most villas under analysis in northern Gaul provided, in some sense or other, a focal point for the local community. Given the archaeology of the north Gallic villa, I shall also assume that in this region most were centres of working, farming establishments with a tenurial relationship of some sort with the lands round about.

North of the Seine, villas were generally of small to middling size. There were also many fewer after the third century, though the extent of numerical decline remains debatable. The degree of complete abandonment in the late third century has probably been overestimated.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, depending upon the region under discussion, between a quarter and half of the villas in existence at the start of the third century had apparently been deserted by the beginning of the fourth.<sup>5</sup> The process of abandonment continued, albeit unevenly, until the troubles of the decades around 400 killed off the survivors. More optimistic survival rates are often based simply upon continued occupation of a site whereas a key tenet of this study will be that the *nature* of occupation is crucial. Fifth-century and later occupation sometimes takes the form of small wooden buildings, indistinguishable in material cultural terms from other sites in the settlement pattern and employing traditional indigenous architectural forms.<sup>6</sup> This surely suggests that

*Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. G. P. Brogiolo, N. Christie and N. Gauthier (Leiden, 2000), pp.63–114 (pp.63–66). Their discussion of the documentary usage of *villa* is based largely upon secondary sources and is somewhat problematic.

<sup>4</sup> For example, Halsall, *Settlement*, pp.176–78, based on problematic figures given by E. M. Wightman, *Gallia Belgica* (London, 1985), p.259.

<sup>5</sup> P. van Ossel *Établissements ruraux de l'antiquité tardive dans le nord de la Gaule*, 51<sup>e</sup> Supplément à Gallia (Paris, 1992), pp. 61–84. The discussion of villa survival in C. R. Whittaker and P. Garnsey, 'Rural Life in the Late Roman Empire', in *The Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. XIII: *The Late Empire, A.D. 337–425*, ed. A. Cameron and P. Garnsey (Cambridge, 1998), pp.277–311 (p.297), seems unduly optimistic.

<sup>6</sup> For example, Neerharen-Rekem (Belgium): van Ossel, *Établissements ruraux*, pp.297–300. At Hoogeloon the stone building was replaced around 200 by a *Wohnstallhaus* of indigenous tradition: M. Carroll, *Romans, Celts and Germans: The German Provinces of Rome* (Stroud, 2001), p.65.

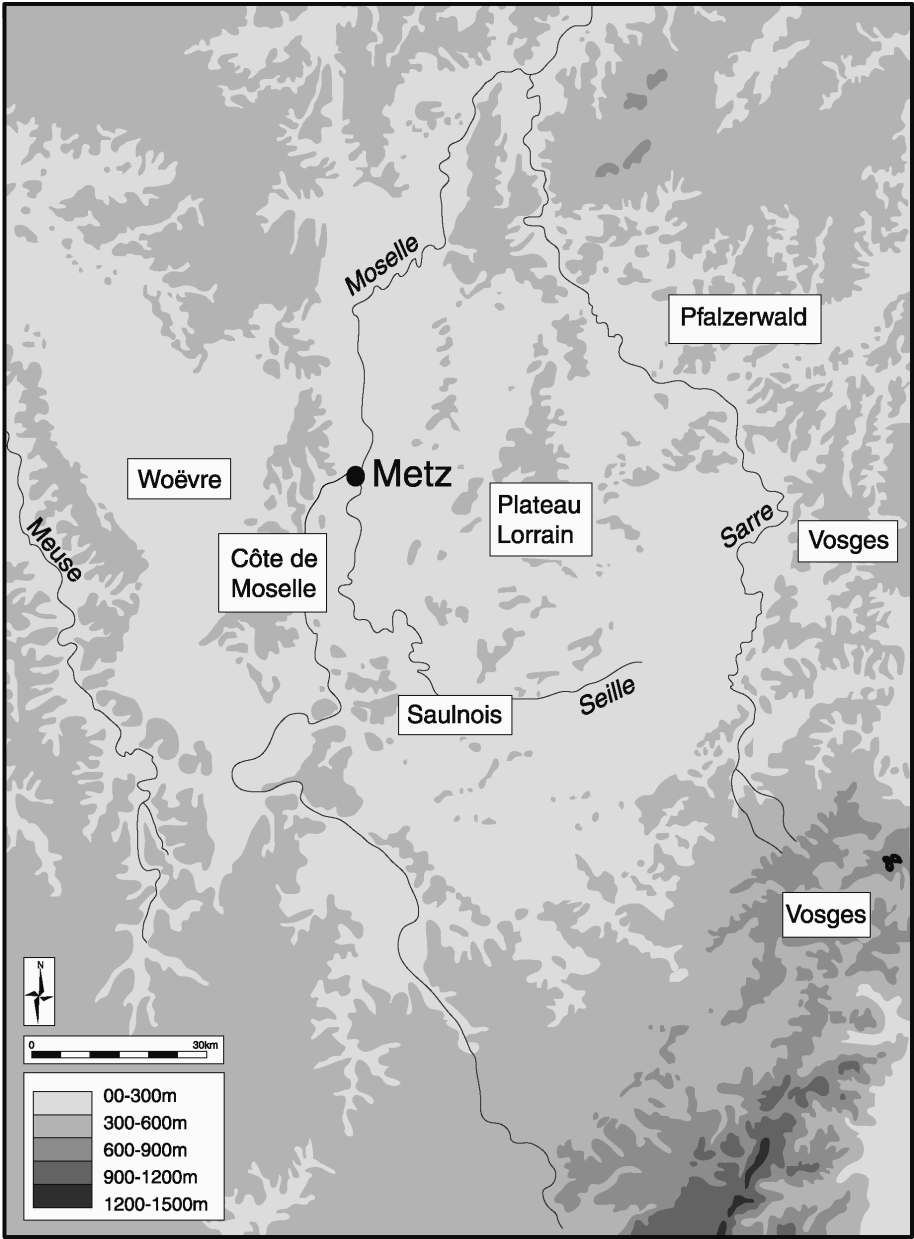


Figure 10.1. The Region of Metz.

in the post-imperial period there existed a different social and economic situation, different possibilities for and extent of surplus extraction, and a different set of relationships between the owners of these sites and the inhabitants of the other settlements in the area from that made manifest earlier by large stone-built, tile-roofed buildings with hypocausts.

There were of course exceptions. Around Trier, the aristocracy was wealthier and more powerful as well as having a direct linkage to the emperor and his court and resources during the fourth century. Unsurprisingly, therefore, villas there can be very substantial.<sup>7</sup> Oddly, it is also in this region that evidence of late third-century destruction is best known.<sup>8</sup> The patchy data from the region of Metz present some similarities to those from around Trier. Survival of villas beyond the third century was comparatively good, but those that did continue were generally small, the most important exception being the great villa at St-Ulrich.<sup>9</sup> It is difficult to say how big the estates centred on these villas were. Marcel Lutz believed that the territory centred on the exceptional villa at St-Ulrich was extensive, but the scale of villa-buildings does not generally suggest huge estates. In modern communes, there is usually only one place-name with an ending believed by place-name specialists to derive from Latin estate names (most obviously *-y* from *-iacum*, a common ending for Roman estate names<sup>10</sup>). Communes here usually encompass a half-dozen or so square kilometres, perhaps indicating the size of a region of which a villa was focus. It should not be assumed that a villa proprietor *owned* all of this land, and it might also be that these place-names are post-Roman.

This archaeological data does not look like the material cultural signature of a society based around a massively wealthy aristocracy dominating an impoverished dependent peasantry or (even more disputably) rural slavery, such as is still often assumed to have characterized late Roman social relations. We might admit that there could be, and almost certainly were, absentee landlords resident elsewhere — in the south or even further afield — who owned properties in northern Gaul. Some villas might represent hunting lodges or similar. Nevertheless the third- and fourth-century changes underline that the conventional picture of late Roman social structure cannot simply be assumed to have applied in northern Gaul.

<sup>7</sup> For example, Konz (Kr. Trier-Saarburg): van Ossel, *Établissements ruraux*, pp.244–49.

<sup>8</sup> Van Ossel, *Établissements ruraux*, p.70.

<sup>9</sup> M. Lutz, 'Le domaine gallo-romain de Saint-Ulrich (II)', *Gallia*, 30 (1972), 41–82.

<sup>10</sup> Sidonius Apollinaris's estate was called *Avitacum* for example.



The imperial link is crucial. Even with the creation of the field armies, spread more evenly across, and deeper into, the provinces,<sup>11</sup> northern Gaul (including the *Germaniae*) was still the location of large concentrations of troops, all requiring food and provisions. There is considerable archaeological evidence of the militarization of the region, such as large, clearly fortified rural granaries.<sup>12</sup> Their scale, compared with that of 'private' building, has led to the reasonable assumption that they are connected with the supply of the armies and the bureaucracy.

The archaeological evidence from the critical period between 383 and 421 also suggests that the local aristocracy was very militarized. Burials that appear in the region during those decades reveal local elites demonstrating their power through the use of weaponry and badges of imperial, probably military, office — official belt-sets and brooches.<sup>13</sup> The reduction in the numbers of northern Gaulish villas might manifest an increasing militarization of society. It might more plausibly reflect an imperial takeover of lands and their produce to feed the Rhine garrisons, the praesental field army and the central imperial bureaucracy at Trier. This process might be revealed by the *Langmauer*, the long wall surrounding an estate near Trier known, from epigraphic evidence, to have been constructed by troops from a legion of *Primani*.<sup>14</sup> Such estates could have been granted, through emphyteutic leases (long-term leases, carrying obligations to improve the land), to imperial officers. Their yields might alternatively have been granted on a short-term basis to imperial servants, the comparatively rapid turnover of recipients of such

<sup>11</sup> D. Hoffmann, *Das Spätromische Bewegungsheer und die Notitia Dignitatum*, 2 vols, Epigraphische Studien, 7.1 and 7.2 (Düsseldorf, 1969–70); R. S. O. Tomlin, 'The Army of the Late Empire', in *The Roman World*, ed. J. Wachter (London, 1987), pp.107–23; H. Elton, *Warfare in Roman Europe, 350–425* (Oxford, 1996); A. D. Lee, 'The Army', in *Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. XIII, ed. Cameron and Garnsey, pp.211–37.

<sup>12</sup> P. van Ossel, 'Insécurité et militarisation en Gaule du Nord au Bas-Empire: L'exemple des campagnes', *Revue du Nord*, 77 (1995), 27–36; H. Bender, 'Archaeological Perspectives on Rural Settlement in Late Antiquity in the Rhine and Danube Area', in *Urban Centers and Rural Contexts in Late Antiquity*, ed. T. S. Burns and J. W. Eadie (East Lansing, MI, 2001), pp.147–61.

<sup>13</sup> G. Halsall, 'The Origins of the Reihengräberzivilisation: Forty Years On', in *Fifth-Century Gaul: A Crisis of Identity?*, ed. J. F. Drinkwater and H. Elton (Cambridge, 1992), pp.196–207; G. Halsall, 'Archaeology and the Late Roman Frontier in Northern Gaul: The So-Called Föderatengräber Reconsidered', in *Grenze und Differenz im früheren Mittelalter*, ed. W. Pohl and H. Reimitz (Vienna, 2000), pp.167–80. These burials should not be associated with Germanic settlers.

<sup>14</sup> H. Cüppers, ed., *Trier: Kaiserresidenz und Bischofssitz: Die Stadt in spätantiker und frühchristlicher Zeit* (Mainz, 1984), pp.288–91.

patronage explaining why this surplus was no longer turned into permanent high-status buildings (villas) on the estates.

Whatever the case, we should stress the apparent stability of local society for much of the fourth century; the importance of the empire and its structures in ensuring such stability, either through maintaining social order amongst a broad and not very wealthy local 'squirearchy' by law, office and patronage, or in maintaining absentee landlords' security of tenure of far-flung estates, or in providing frameworks for the extraction of surplus, markets and so on; and the importance of the fiscal role of land and produce. This last point and the fact that the local community was keyed into, and perhaps entirely dependent upon, a wider set of political structures is especially important.

### The Merovingian Villa

Roman villa-complexes (as defined above) are extinct by c.450 in this part of the world, and usually earlier. That leaves the thorny issue of where exactly early Merovingian high-status settlements were, an issue to which I have at best only tentative answers.<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless a few people living in huts amidst ruined stone buildings, as at Nennig in the southern Triererland,<sup>16</sup> does not, in any meaningful sense, a villa make. There is, however, general continuity of the settlement pattern between the late Roman and Merovingian periods; the distribution map of Merovingian cemeteries is much the same as that of late Roman settlements.<sup>17</sup> There is some contraction but this *seems* to have taken place earlier during the late Roman period. Stray and chance finds suggest a close relationship between substantial Roman buildings — probably (though not certainly) villas — Merovingian cemeteries, churches and modern villages.<sup>18</sup> The bulk of known Merovingian

<sup>15</sup> People wore their wealth, as discussed below; perhaps powerful people lived in former Roman higher-order settlements: *vici*, *castra*, *castella*\* or towns.

<sup>16</sup> K. Böhner, *Die fränkischen Altertümer des Triererlandes*, 2 vols, Germanische Denkmäler der Völkerwanderungszeit, Serie B, Band 1 (Berlin, 1958), II, 88–91. Van Ossel, *Établissements ruraux*, pp.383–84. Above, pp.210, 212.

<sup>17</sup> F. Stein, 'Die Bevölkerung des Saar-Mosel-Raumes am Übergang von der Antike zum Mittelalter: Überlegungen zum Kontinuitätsproblem aus archäologischer Sicht', *Archaeologia Mosellana*, 1 (1989), 89–195, Abb. 5 and 6.

<sup>18</sup> Modern survey in the département of Aisne suggests similar patterns: C. Haselgrove and C. Scull, 'Early Medieval Rural Settlement in North-East France: Field Survey Evidence from the Aisne Valley, Picardy', in *Early Medieval Europe 1992: A Conference on Medieval Archaeology in*

cemeteries are close to modern settlements,<sup>19</sup> suggesting a general continuity from Roman to modern of occupation in the area of some modern villages. This conclusion, proposed from my systematic survey of the extant data in 1986–93, has recently been confirmed by a detailed study of the commune of Basse-Yutz.<sup>20</sup> Here clear evidence was revealed of continued occupation in the general area of those Roman settlements (at Haute- and Basse-Yutz) that continued to be occupied into the late Roman period, whereas early Roman sites that did not survive into the fourth century showed no trace of post-Roman settlement. This means neither that the Merovingian settlement pattern entirely underlies the modern, nor that Merovingian settlements excavated away from modern villages are ‘failed settlements’.<sup>21</sup> What it does suggest is that one element, and I suggest a prestigious element, of the settlement pattern underlies the modern network. The Yutz study supports this postulation in that a royal villa existed there by the mid-ninth century. The fractious sons of Louis the Pious met there in 844 for one of the conferences aimed, with general lack of success, at ending their squabbling.<sup>22</sup>

With no archaeologically attested Merovingian villas, we must ask what Merovingian writers mean when they refer to *villae*. There are very few written sources

*Europe, 21<sup>st</sup>–24<sup>th</sup> Sept 1992 at the University of York: Pre-printed Papers*, 8 vols (York, 1992), VIII, 207–12. Cf. E. Louis, ‘A De-Romanised Landscape in Northern Gaul: The Scarpe Valley from the Fourth to the Ninth Century AD’, in *Recent Research on the Late Antique Countryside*, ed. W. Bowden, L. Lavan and C. Marchado (Leiden, 2004), pp.479–504.

<sup>19</sup> M. Durand, *Archéologie du cimetière médiévale au sud-ouest de l’Oise: relations avec l’habitat et évolution des rites et des pratiques funéraires du VI<sup>ème</sup> au XVI<sup>ème</sup> siècle*, *Revue Archéologique de Picardie*, numéro spéciale (Amiens, 1988); M. Durand, ‘Cimetières et habitats: l’émergence du village au sud-ouest du département de l’Oise’, *Revue Archéologique de Picardie*, 3–4 (1988), 153–60. E. Zadora-Rio, ‘The Making of Churchyards and Parish Territories in the Early Medieval Landscape of France and England in the 7<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> Centuries: A Reconsideration’, *Medieval Archaeology*, 47 (2003), 1–19 (esp. pp.8–9).

<sup>20</sup> J.-M. Blaising, ‘Yutz (57), archéologie d’un terroir des âges de métaux aux XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle’, *Archaeologia Mosellana*, 4 (2002), 185–217 (esp. p.213). Halsall, *Settlement*, p.200, discussing Yutz, repeats the then general assumption that Basse-Yutz was a larger agglomeration, or *vicus* (the evidence discussed is that, specifically, from Basse-Yutz though this is not made clear). Blaising, ‘Yutz’, stresses the lack of evidence for this assumption.

<sup>21</sup> H. Hamerow, *Early Medieval Settlements: The Archaeology of Rural Communities in North-West Europe 400–900* (Oxford, 2002), p.106, recently and rightly takes to task my slack use of that phrase: Halsall, *Settlement*, p.184.

<sup>22</sup> Most chronicle sources state that this meeting took place across the Moselle in Thionville but the acts of the ecclesiastical council place it in *Iudicium*. *Die Konzilien der karolingischen Teilreiche, 843–859*, ed. W. Hartmann, MGH Concilia, 3 (Hannover, 1989), p.29.

from this region before the third quarter of the seventh century so any usage uncovered might represent the end of a process. Traditionally, the *villa*, in documentary sources, is an estate. The word *does* have this sense in some documents, especially when referring to royal estates or gifts, but it is not its only meaning. The **cartulary**\* of Wissembourg Abbey, founded in the mid-seventh century,<sup>23</sup> is well known as one of the earliest repositories of non-royal documents, giving an insight into the late Merovingian landscape. In its documents a *villa* is a unit of land, within which several people could have estates. Until the 780s *villa* was seemingly a synonym for *finēs*\* (bounds; limits) or its Germanic counterpart *marca*\* (whence the English ‘marches’). Rarely is more than one of these words found in the same document, suggesting that one could stand for the other. With the exception of the *villa* of Waldhambach, which the charters repeatedly define as between the rivers Mittelbrunn and Eichel (still respectively the southern and northern bounds of the commune of Waldhambach), there are no boundary clauses for these *villae*. Nor are they measured; people seem to have known where their edges were. Mostly these are quite extensive grants of land.

From the 780s the documents change to referring to grants *in villa vel in finēs* or *vel in marca* (in the *villa* or in the *finēs* [or *marca*]).<sup>24</sup> Such a shift is perhaps adumbrated by an early eighth-century charter referring to the gift of a *curtilis* (small farm) in *Audoneuillare* and fields and woods in the *fine Auduninse*.<sup>25</sup> This suggests that the *villa* (in this case incorporated in the place-name *Audoneuillare*) could be distinct from the *finēs* (and note that in this case the name *Auduninse* ends in *-ensis*, the ending used in Latin names for regions — for example in the *pagus Salinensis*, the administrative district, later county, around the River Seille). It might, alternatively, be argued that the earlier usage in the Wissembourg cartulary implies that *villa* and *finēs* were clearly different, and hence no charter discusses the two together, whereas the change after the 780s argues that the two had become interchangeable. This is plausible but I prefer to interpret the change as showing that hitherto interchangeable terms became distinguished from each other, not least because some later documents specify *villae* within *finēs*.<sup>26</sup> Also from the 780s, the Wissembourg documents begin to refer to small, measured parcels of

<sup>23</sup> Halsall, *Settlement*, pp.188–92. *Traditiones Wizenburgenses: Die Urkunden des Klosters Weissenburg, 661–864*, ed. K. Glückner and A. Doll (Darmstadt, 1979).

<sup>24</sup> Halsall, *Settlement*, p.190.

<sup>25</sup> Wissembourg, charter 228, dated 705–06.

<sup>26</sup> For example, Wissembourg, charter 217, dated 783; Wissembourg, charter 82, dated 786.

land and, whereas large grants bestow lands 'in the *villa* or in the *marca*', these lesser grants are usually specifically located in *either* the *villa* or in the *marca* / *fines*.

Above all, the latter interpretation, of a distinction of *villa* from *fines* after 780, is supported by developments in the charters of the monastery of Gorze. Gorze was founded in the mid-eighth century and reformed in the tenth. Its charters' information about landscape organization needs closer study and re-examination in the light of John Nightingale's study of the reformed monasteries in Lorraine.<sup>27</sup> Nightingale's detailed, scholarly and more specialist analysis of these charters seriously questions the authenticity of the early Gorze documents, especially the detailed and interesting charter no. 19.<sup>28</sup> The latter is apparently a tenth-century document wrongly dated to the late eighth century by the cartulary's compilers on the basis of a confusion of one King Charles ('the Simple') with another ('the Great'). Nevertheless, the indictional dates and other chronological indices carefully inserted by the later scribe are most consistent, with each other and with the regnal years given in the charters. Leaving the clearly spurious charters aside, the chronology of changes in the vocabulary used to describe settlements is also remarkably consistent and seems unlikely to result from later forgery.

This chronology, moreover, ties in well with the Wissembourg documents. Early, or at least putatively early, Gorze charters refer to lands in *villae* in much the same way as the earlier Wissembourg charters. Then, from c.775, while a change was taking place in the Wissembourg charters' **formulae**\*, they switch to the formula '*in villa* N (usually a personal name in the genitive) *vel in fines* N (ending in *-iacum*, the old Roman estate place-name termination, *-ensis*, the regional ending, or, occasionally, both)'. Sometimes *villa* is replaced by its synonym *curtis* ('courtyard' or farm, underlining that this element refers to a specific settlement rather than a region). *Villa* and *curtis* have given rise to the large number of

<sup>27</sup> Halsall, *Settlement*, pp.192–95. J. Nightingale, *Monasteries and Patrons in the Gorze Reform* (Oxford, 2001), pp.25–29. *Cartulaire de l'Abbaye de Gorze (Mettensia 2)*, ed. A. D'Herbomez (Paris, 1898; introduction dated 1902). The possibilities for refined study are limited by the destruction of the earliest (thirteenth-century) manuscript of the Gorze cartulary, upon which D'Herbomez's edition was based, during street-fighting in Metz in late 1944. The German garrison made its last stand on the Île de la Préfecture, location of the city archives. Indeed, sent out to negotiate the surrender was the archivist, none other than the celebrated Merovingian historian, Eugen Ewig. The surviving manuscripts are both less complete and later (eighteenth- and fifteenth-century respectively) but might profitably be examined more closely. D'Herbomez apparently used neither.

<sup>28</sup> Cited, alas, at length by Halsall, *Settlement*, p.193.

place-names ending in ‘-ville’ or ‘-court’ in the region.<sup>29</sup> One might translate thus: ‘in so-and-so’s *villa* or within the bounds of that territory’. Three examples: ‘within the bounds of “Ragnulfiacum” (an *-acum* name) or in that *villa* of “Ragnulf’s Villa”’ (*in Ragnulfiaga fine vel in ipsa villa Ragnulfi villa*); ‘within the bounds of “Lagbriacensis” (*-acum* plus *-ensis*) or in “Labrigia villa”’; or ‘within the bounds of “Ingariensis” (an *-ensis* name) or in the *villa* called “Hingarigo Curtis”’.<sup>30</sup> This lasts up to the 850s before being replaced by *in villa N vel in ipsa fines* (‘in so-and-so’s *villa* or within those bounds’). Again, though, while the Gorze cartulary contains numerous boundary clauses and measured units of land, largely because the lands donated tend to be small parcels, the boundaries of the *fines* are never defined.

Thus, in non-royal contexts, a Merovingian *villa* is essentially a small region. ‘Lagbriacensis’, for example, might equate with the commune of Labry. Bange reached a similar conclusion about the meaning of *villa* in tenth-century Burgundian documents.<sup>31</sup> Early sixth-century Burgundian law already specified that a *villa* could be understood in this way.<sup>32</sup> One clause in the Frankish *Pactus Legis Salicae* suggests the importance of the *villa*-community: the *vicini* (neighbours) who can accept or reject newcomers into their community live in *villae*.<sup>33</sup> Finally, at one point in the so-called ‘feud’ of Sichar and Chramnesind (586–87), Chramnesind burnt Sichar’s house and those of all those who shared the *villa* (*spoliatis [...] domus omnes tam Sichari quam reliquorum qui participes huius villae erant*).<sup>34</sup> Within the *villa*-region the basic unit of settlement was the *mansus*\*, sometimes called by a latinized version of its Germanic equivalent, *hoba*\* (Hof), in the Wissembourg documents. *Mansi* could be quite large; in the Merovingian documents from the Metz region they could be granted with lists of appurtenances.<sup>35</sup> Only

<sup>29</sup> See distribution map in Halsall, *Settlement*, p.11.

<sup>30</sup> *Cartulaire de l’Abbaye de Gorze*, ed. D’Herbomez, charters 26, 28 and 37, dated 786, 788 and 795 respectively. None of these charters is specified as a forgery by Nightingale.

<sup>31</sup> F. Bange, ‘L’ager et la villa: structures du paysage et du peuplement dans la région Mâconnaise à la fin du haut moyen âge (IX<sup>e</sup>–XI<sup>e</sup> siècles)’, *Annales ESC*, 41 (1984), 529–69.

<sup>32</sup> *Liber Constitutionum* 38.4; *Leges Burgundionum*, ed. F. de Salis, MGH Legum Sect. I, 2.1, (Hannover, 1892).

<sup>33</sup> *Pactus Legis Salicae* 45, 102, ed. K.-A. Eckhardt, MGH Legum Sect. I, 4.1 (Hannover, 1962), pp.173–76.

<sup>34</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Histories*, VII.47, ed. B. Krusch and W. Levison, MGH SRM, 1.1 (Hannover, 1951), p.367.

<sup>35</sup> That *mansi* are found within *villae* poses problems for Ripoll and Arce’s statement (‘Transformation and End of Roman *villae*’, p.66) that the *mansus* is the seventh-century equivalent of the *villa*.

in royal documents can the *villa* be understood to mean a single property (although this might contain several settlements). Merovingian kings habitually grant *our villa called N*. Though few Merovingian royal charters survive for the region under discussion in this essay it is true for those that do exist: *villam nostram nuncupante Marte* ('our villa called Mars [la Tour]') for instance. This usage does not seem specific to the region of Metz. In other documents, royal *villae* are conceived of as single units of royal landed property.

### From Roman to Merovingian Villa

How did the villa develop from a Roman farmhouse or estate into a Merovingian region? With no Roman documents from the region the apparent transformation in usage could simply reflect a change in the rates of documentary survival. Perhaps a villa in Gaul was *always* a region; this would make a certain sense. A second alternative would see the villa as a fiscal unit of assessment. Landowners were responsible for their tax *professio*, and an estate and dependencies was a fiscal unit. Jean Durliat has proposed this.<sup>36</sup>

A third possibility involves local politics. Early fifth-century villa abandonment appears to have been brought about by the crisis of the empire. The end of effective imperial presence in the north caused enormous stress, as one might expect given the points made above. This was exacerbated by the fact that Roman rule was not terminated neatly by rapid conquest or formal treaty. It was instead a messy process of de facto abandonment as in Britain, where the results were similar, and Spain, where they were not.<sup>37</sup> Northern Gaulish social organization had, as argued above, depended upon the empire's presence. Without that, the local 'squirearchy' was, like the British aristocracy but unlike the Spanish, unable to fill the power vacuum. Without the support provided by the empire, local power was up for grabs and expensively maintained from one generation to the next. Such surplus as was acquired was dissipated in gifts to purchase or reinforce support, leaving none for the maintenance of villa-buildings or industry.<sup>38</sup> From

<sup>36</sup> J. Durliat, *Les finances publiques de Dioclétien aux Carolingiens (284–890)*, Beihefte der Francia, 21 (Sigmaringen, 1990), pp.253–56. I do not accept all of Durliat's argument.

<sup>37</sup> For narrative of the end of empire in the west and a survey of its effects, see my forthcoming *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West* (Cambridge), chapters 6–9 and 11.

<sup>38</sup> Decline might be overplayed — pottery was exchanged across large regions. Nevertheless there *was* serious contraction. The range of decoration and forms of vessels are dramatically

the last quarter of the fourth century, evidence of occupation at Metz itself is very slender; such evidence peters out at the *vici*\*/*castra* of the region from c.400; and the final phase of villa abandonment had been played out by c.425.<sup>39</sup> Thus, socio-political interaction retreated to a very local arena, the villa-region, which might further explain the continuity of the unit and term *villa*, even as what lay behind the word changed. The change in the nature of the villa might involve a mixture of all the above factors.

### *Insiders: The Community*

How did the Roman villa-buildings act as a focus for a community and how did the community work to preserve the villa as a geographical/social unit? We might explore this through the region's cemeteries. Many Merovingian cemeteries are adjacent to Roman villas.<sup>40</sup> In the Metz region the latter are, as far as can be told from the available data, generally those whose occupation continued after the third century. Even if old tenurial relationships had broken down in the early fifth century, the ruins of the villa-buildings seemingly continued to provide a focus for important communal rituals. Perhaps the villa's owners began this by staging important funerary rites at the site. The well-known lavish burial 319, for instance, 'founds' the cemetery at Lavoye, located by a villa occupied throughout the fourth century.<sup>41</sup> The important families of a community need not have lost their pre-eminence but it was apparently much more open to threat and expensive to maintain. By c.525 whole communities were participating in the competitive ritual of furnished burial. If funerary ritual was important in helping to define a community, on the basis of its shared cemetery near the old Roman villa-buildings (which might have given the community its toponymic identification — 'the people of such-and-such villa'), then this community seems to have been shaped by a *central*

reduced, and the fact that even these plain pots were sought over comparatively long distances indicates some economic decline. Such basic wares seem hitherto to have been produced on **villa-estates**': M. Corbier, 'Grande proprietà fondaria e piccole aziende: La Gallia settentrionale in epoca Romana', in *Società Romana e Impero Tardoantico*, vol. III: *Le merci, gli insediamenti*, ed. A. Giardina (Rome, 1986), pp.687–702, with notes at pp.897–903 (p.699). Though we must agree to differ, I am immensely grateful to Chris Wickham for discussion of this issue.

<sup>39</sup> Halsall, *Settlement*, pp.176–84, 199–211, 219–31.

<sup>40</sup> See also above, note 19.

<sup>41</sup> Halsall, *Settlement*, pp.118–42. R. Joffroy, *Le Cimetière Mérovingien de Lavoye* (Paris, 1974).



ritual focal point, as perhaps it was later by its church, rather than (as yet) defining itself by delineating its edges: the bounds or borders between itself and its neighbours. That burial rites were a powerful means of shaping communal identity seems likely. As will be discussed below, they were a focus for competition as well as the reaffirmation of ties and alliances within the community, and the location of important economic rites of gift-exchange. It is also noteworthy that sixth-century cemeteries, or cemetery phases, are larger than seventh-century. Cemeteries like Koenigsmacker, Métrich and Puxieux (all destroyed without any archaeological recording) apparently contained two hundred burials or more, a figure also estimated for Ennery. The sixth-century phase of Lavoye contained 198 graves, nearly twice as many as in the seventh-century phase (Fig. 10.2), a ratio also seen at Dieue-sur-Meuse.<sup>42</sup>

I have previously elaborated an explanation for the furnished burial as a symptom of local competition for power and of the insecurity of local status.<sup>43</sup> Analysis of the grave-goods' patterns of distribution suggests that the greatest ritual displays were associated with those people whose deaths caused the greatest rupture in local social networks: adult males who had died before their sons had established themselves, and younger women who were important as the linchpins in alliances between families. Study of the grave-goods reveals clear local customs governing the sorts of grave-goods appropriate to particular categories of people: children generally with few grave-goods and never masculine ones; teenage women with jewellery; young adult males with weapons; old people with few grave-goods; and so on. These are most plausibly viewed as communal norms. In sixth-century cemeteries, local standing was apparently demonstrated, maintained and perhaps enhanced by the *exaggeration* of these norms, *not* by their infringement. Thus, most of the region's Adelsgräber or 'tombes de chef' are characterized by the interment of large numbers of the appropriate grave-goods for an individual of that age and gender. Examples include Lavoye 319, Güdingen 4 and Chaouilley 20c.<sup>44</sup> At

<sup>42</sup> J. Guillaume, 'Les nécropoles mérovingiennes de Dieue/Meuse (France)', *Acta Praehistorica et Archaeologica*, 5–6 (1974–75), 211–349.

<sup>43</sup> Halsall, *Settlement*, pp.245–48; developed in G. Halsall, 'Burial, Ritual and Merovingian Society', in *The Community, the Family and the Saint: Patterns of Power in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. J. Hill and M. Swan (Turnhout, 1998), pp.325–38; G. Halsall, 'Burial Writes: Graves, "Texts" and Time in Early Merovingian Northern Gaul', in *Erinnerungskultur im Bestattungsritual: Archäologisch-Historisches Forum*, ed. J. Jarnut (Darmstadt, 2004), pp.61–74.

<sup>44</sup> Lavoye: references at note 41. Güdingen: F. Stein, 'Les tombes d'un chef franc et de sa famille à Güdingen: Considérations sur le rôle de l'aristocratie dans l'implantation franque entre

Ennery, by contrast, there are two burials (graves 70 and 71) that appear to demonstrate distinction by clear *breach* of the norms;<sup>45</sup> this seems unusual in the sixth century.

As is well known, sixth-century cemeteries were often organized by rows. Lavoye's sixth-century phase is a good example. There were perhaps also norms about the burial of particular types of people. The sixth-century phase at Lavoye comprised three distinct groups of burials, suggesting similar internal spatial arrangements, such as the burials of women mostly being located in the northern half of the zone. A similar distribution is also notable at Ennery. Child burials are also found in clusters. This suggests communal organization. It is also interesting to think about clusters of similar burials. In the past, I have interpreted these as members of the same family, the usual way of reading ritual similarities. If we see the development of cemeteries by rows, according to communal organization, however, perhaps similar burials are those of people of similar social standing (and age-group and gender) who died close in time. They are part of a ritual dialogue conducted within terms defined by the villa-community.<sup>46</sup> I suspect, furthermore, that appeal to villa-community custom or norms was one means of keeping ambitious families in their place, combating their desire to break free of these norms and mark themselves out as different from their neighbours.

The villa-community might then have been the normal arena for social interaction. It doubtless overlapped and nested within other types of community. It is probable that kinship networks tended to cross the borders of villa-territories, for example. Larger-scale geographical territories defining levels of community are more difficult to perceive. The *civitas*\* probably existed in the north of Gaul, but the evidence is very unclear. Nevertheless, an analysis of the patterns of lavish burial in the region suggests that the town of Metz was the focus for some social and political action. Burials with unusually lavish displays of grave-goods are common only beyond about a day's journey from the old *civitas*-capital. This suggests that whereas further away from this centre competition for local status was focussed even more on the burial ritual, close to the city such standing was ascertained by

la Meuse et la Sarre', *Saarbrücker Studien und Materialien zur Altertumskunde*, 1 (1992), 117–44. Chaouilley: J. Voinot, 'Les fouilles de Chaouilley: Cimetière mérovingien', *Mémoires de la Société Archéologique Lorraine*, 54 (1904), 5–80.

<sup>45</sup> Halsall, *Settlement*, pp.92–93. Alain Simmer subsequently published the site's data more thoroughly: *La nécropole d'Ennery (Moselle)* (Woippy, 1992). This has little effect on my analysis.

<sup>46</sup> Halsall, 'Burial Writes'.

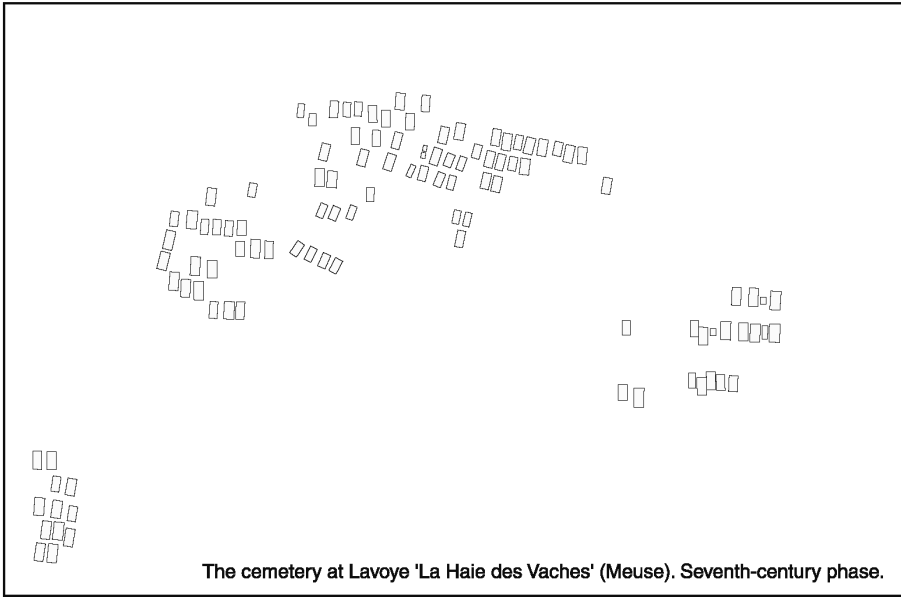
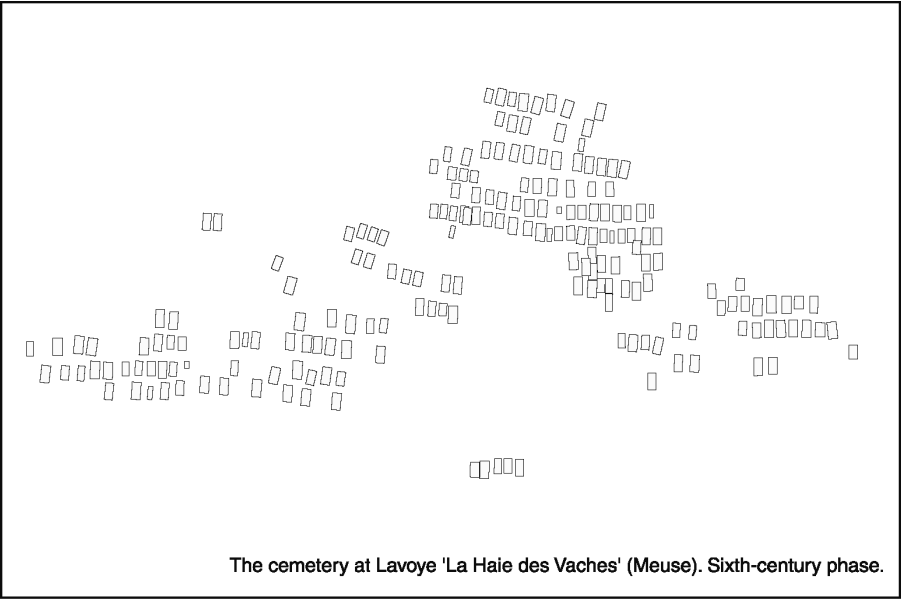


Figure 10.2. The sixth- and seventh-century phases of the cemetery at Lavoye, 'La Haie des Vaches'.

appeal to the secular and ecclesiastical powers based in the city.<sup>47</sup> Metz's ability to act as such a focus might also have been based upon its function as a major royal centre. Other *civitas*-capitals in the region do not appear to have the same effects upon the distribution patterns of lavish graves.

There were fewer large cemeteries in the sixth century than in the seventh (Fig. 10.3). Although, when looking at the totality of a region's cemetery data, the evidence is usually poor and partial, the greater numbers of seventh-century cemeteries cannot result from chance or differential discovery. Sixth-century burials contained more grave-goods and more distinctive artefact-types (S-Brooches, most bow-brooch types, bird-brooches, *franciscae*\*, *angones*\* and so on) not found in seventh-century necropoleis. This means that sixth-century cemeteries are easier than seventh-century to detect in lacunose written accounts of archaeological discoveries. The contrast in the density of distribution must be real. This increase in numbers relates not to a seventh-century expansion of settlement but rather to the relative size of cemeteries in the two periods. Around 600, the importance of the old cemetery broke down with the foundation of new graveyards, significantly illustrating the fragmentation of the earlier villa-communities. Sixth-century cemeteries appear to be used by large communities, probably drawn from several settlements/residential groups. At Lavoye, the three groups mentioned above apparently represent the burials of three different settlements or geographically defined sub-communities, coming together for burial in the main cemetery. Only one of these groups really continued into the seventh century (see Fig. 10.2). In association with this development, new small cemeteries were founded, with fewer grave-goods. In turn this is linked to a switch to greater investment in above-ground monuments rather than transient grave-goods. Seventh-century cemeteries were also organized, it seems, by family. Organization by rows breaks down and instead we see small clusters of burials of individuals of all ages and both sexes. Simultaneously, social difference is shown by the breach of the old norms. This can be seen very clearly at Audun-le-Tiche, where a cluster of prestigious burials in and around the remains of a Roman *fanum* complex includes old women buried with, for that site and period, unusually lavish jewellery.<sup>48</sup> Such items had, in this region during the sixth century, generally been associated with women between puberty and forty, and usually at the lower end of that age-bracket.

<sup>47</sup> Halsall, *Settlement*, pp.17–18 (continuity of *civitas* unit); pp.107–08, 260 (distribution of lavish graves).

<sup>48</sup> Halsall, *Settlement*, pp.158–59. A. Simmer, *Le cimetière Mérovingien d'Audun-le-Tiche: archéologie d'aujourd'hui no.1* Mémoire de l'Association française d'Archéologie Mérovingienne, 2 (Paris, 1988).

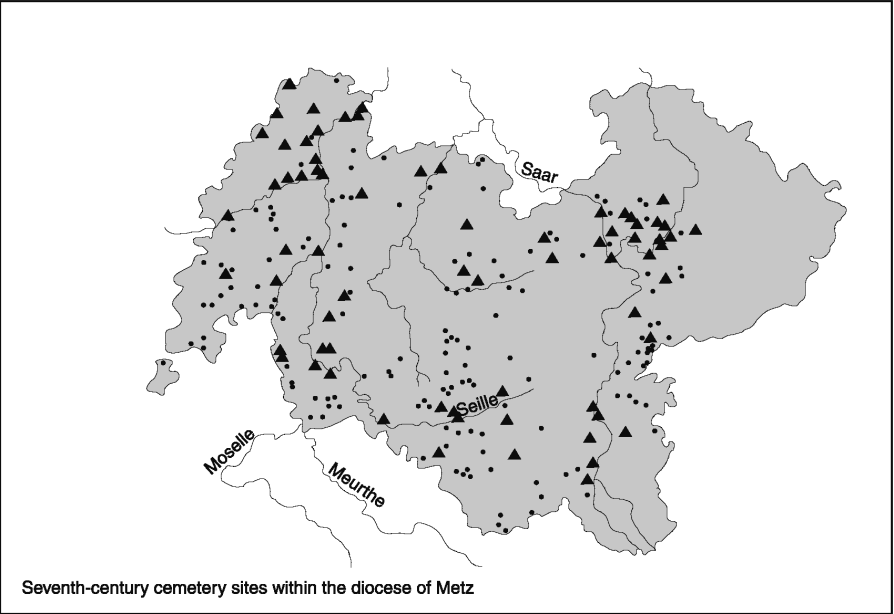
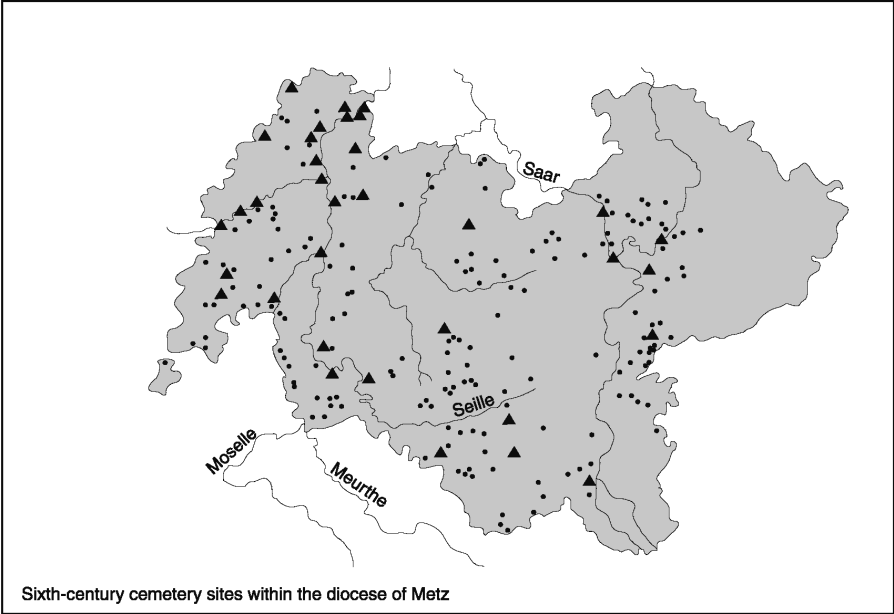


Figure 10.3. Distribution of sixth- and seventh-century cemeteries within the *civitas* of Metz.

The explanation for these changes must be sought in greater security of local status. This led to the weakening of the importance of the old ritual focus and reduced the need to demonstrate status to a large audience present on the day of the funeral. Burials began to take place within the villa structures at this time, which should probably be interpreted as another manifestation of above-ground commemoration. A change in the buildings' function, and possibly their final abandonment as any sort of dwelling-place, may have been associated with this. This increased security and stability of social hierarchy might have helped break up the community as previously defined (simultaneously, the breakdown of the strength of the former communities might have allowed this security to emerge) and have given rise to the situation attested in the later seventh-century charters in other ways.

In the seventh century the increase in data available shows the appearance of another larger-scale community based around geographical units, above the villa and below the *civitas*: that based upon the *pagus* (there were at least five *pagi* within the *civitas* of Metz). A reference in Fredegar's *Chronicle* (dating to the 660s) suggests that individuals might be defined by their *pagus* of residence: a man is referred to as a *homo scarponiensis* (a man from the district of Scarponne, on the Moselle south of Metz).<sup>49</sup> These *pagi* seem to replace the *civitas* as the general unit of administrative organization — by the Carolingian period at least, they tended to be governed by counts — although the latter retains importance as a bishopric. The patterns of documentary survival are doubtless partly to blame, but it remains interesting, especially given the upsurge in activity in the city from the late sixth century, that very few Merovingian and early Carolingian charters are issued in Metz, as one might have expected had the city remained a focus for regional political activity. I suggest that the appearance of the *pagus* is part of the same process as saw the break-up of the old large cemetery-using communities and of the *civitas*. The more secure status of dominant families within *villae* probably led to their establishment of kinship and other links with like families in other areas, so that the *pagus* unit became a more meaningful arena of social action at the level of local and regional elites.

### *Insiders versus Outsiders*

Internal community dynamics might have helped preserve the villa as a unit. So, too, I suggest, did the relationships between the villa-community and the outside world. Small arenas of socio-political interaction, local competition and insecurity

<sup>49</sup> Fredegar, *Chronicle*, 4.52, in *The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar with its Continuations*, ed. and trans. J. M. Wallace-Hadrill (London, 1960), p.43.

of status are not antithetical to large and powerful political units: states or kingdoms. The Merovingian example makes that very clear. Connection with the Merovingian kingdom was an effective local political strategy. The families that had communal pre-eminence in the fourth century might well still have had it at the end of the sixth but it was, as stated, expensively maintained and resolutely local. They were unable to break away into a broader socio-political arena. Involvement with the Merovingians allowed participation in wider politics, and a return to something like the fourth-century situation. Adopting ethnic identity played a part in this, enabling participation in the army and in other types of politics. This led to another important aspect of this strategy, royal patronage in the form of office. This not only permitted involvement in wider politics, it was also a means of securing local power: officials had judicial roles.

Such figures also collected taxes. Here we return to the villa as fiscal unit. Taxation continued in sixth-century northern Gaul, though its details escape us. The significance of the *vicani* dwelling in *villae* discussed in the *Pactus Legis Salicae* has been related to fiscal obligation.<sup>50</sup> How did it operate in this non-monetary economy? I have only tentative proposals. I suggest that Merovingian royal officials and other servants were paid, like late Roman troops and officials, with drafts on tax revenue and that this is what is meant in sixth-century sources when a king grants a *villa* to someone. Here my approach owes much to the work of Walter Goffart,<sup>51</sup> although it must be admitted at the outset that there is little in the documents to provide a priori support for my thesis. The hypothesis is based not upon clear empirical support but upon the fact that it makes sense of a number of issues. This is not to say there are not equally plausible alternatives. Nevertheless, there is nothing to gainsay the argument either, and some clues add plausibility to it. One is Roman precedent and in this region, with the military presence discussed earlier, that might be particularly important. Another is the Burgundian legal indication (and the implication of *Pactus Legis Salicae*) that a villa's inhabitants shared fiscal liability. Another possible support is the apparent ease with which *villae* were granted out and reincorporated into the fisc. In the *Life of Romaric* for example, talking about this region, Theuderic II, having killed

<sup>50</sup> A. C. Callander Murray, *Germanic Kinship Structure: Studies in Law and Society in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Toronto, 1983), pp.67–87.

<sup>51</sup> W. Goffart, 'From Roman Taxation to Medieval Seigneurie: Three Notes', *Speculum*, 47 (1972), 15–87 and 373–94; W. Goffart, *Caput and Colonate: Towards a History of Late Roman Taxation* (Toronto, 1974); W. Goffart, 'Old and New in Merovingian Taxation', *Past and Present*, 96 (1982), 3–21.

his brother Theudebert II and his supporters in 612, brought the latter's *villae* back into the fisc (*villae eorum fisci dicionibus redacte sunt*).<sup>52</sup> One might also cite Goffart's discussion of how different forms or levels of taxation withered,<sup>53</sup> though I would read the evidence in a slightly different way. My reading of the villa is thus that in the later fifth and sixth centuries free inhabitants of these regions tended to pay dues only to the Merovingian state and its officers. The precise form which such obligations took might have been related to ethnicity: Franks being liable for military service but being exempt from some taxation; Romans paying taxes.<sup>54</sup> Rents and other exactions owed, on the basis of land tenure, to powerful and established aristocrats were not yet common.

Taxation need not have involved very much payment from the locality to the centre. Perhaps the kings supported themselves essentially from the *villae* that they held directly. Various forms of surplus were paid to the king's designated man on the spot for the latter's maintenance. In the region under discussion, to judge from the later charters, surplus was mainly generated by agriculture, although pig-farming features significantly. Areas such as the Vosges, where livelihoods might have been produced by other means, do not appear to have been occupied in the Merovingian period. The distribution of cemeteries shows that settlement was restricted to land below 300 m above sea-level. Nevertheless, many could have got rich on this surplus. There were very wealthy Merovingian royal officials. We should, however, note that the relationship between a royal officer and those who lived in the area whence he drew his salary would not make him their lord. This is important, helping us explain the absence of such relations of domination (other than those dependent upon royal service) from the earliest Frankish law code.<sup>55</sup> Some tax could have been paid on in bullion. Burials contain many Roman coins, usually early Roman coins with higher intrinsic worth. As has long been known,<sup>56</sup> balances are important features of very lavish burials in northern Gaul,

<sup>52</sup> *Vita Romarici Abbatis Habandensis* 3, ed. B. Krusch, MGH SRM, 4 (Hannover, 1902), pp.221–25.

<sup>53</sup> Goffart, 'Old and New in Merovingian Taxation'.

<sup>54</sup> G. Halsall, *Warfare and Society in the Barbarian West, 450–900* (London, 2003), pp.44–50.

<sup>55</sup> A problem brought out by C.J. Wickham, 'Problems of Comparing Rural Societies in Early Medieval Western Europe', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th series, 2 (1992), 221–46.

<sup>56</sup> J. Werner, 'Fernhandel und Naturalwirtschaft im östlichen Merowingerreich nach archäologischen und numismatischen Zeugnissen', *Bericht der Römisch-Germanischen Kommission*, 42 (1961), 307–46.



probably suggesting that a role in controlling 'weights and measures' was a significant basis of local authority.

People dispatched to collect whatever dues were extracted from these *villae* and men sent to support themselves with drafts on taxation would be seen as outsiders by the villa-community. Here, perhaps, the levying of dues was a means by which participation in the wider polity helped to define the villa-community. If the villa was a 'fiscal asset', that might have helped identify its inhabitants as a group. Taxation was, thus, a prize that drew individuals into royal service and out of their localities, but at the same time, the execution of royal service might have been a force that maintained the reality and identity of villa-communities.

To explain the changes that took place around 600 we can postulate that the right to collect royal dues from a designated region was converted into the outright *ownership* of the land of that territory.<sup>57</sup> In the past I have argued that this was by royal grant, or grant by those controlling the palace, to buy support in a period of political crisis during the royal minorities from 575 onwards.<sup>58</sup> This transformation could also have been brought about by force during periods of weak royal rule. This transformation in the nature of authority is significant in that it changes the relationship between the aristocrat and the inhabitants of the villa, transforming the latter into tenants. At this point a surplus-extracting stratum is increasingly interposed between freeman and state. Hence Ripuarian Law's differences from Salic Law in regard to social structure: it refers to freemen in the service (*obsequium*) of others, to freemen with their followers (*satellites*), to immunities, and to lords answering for their dependants in court.<sup>59</sup> Grants of *villae* in the seventh-century charters are gifts of outright ownership.

How was the picture presented by the charters brought about? Ownership of *villae* could have fragmented through the usual mechanisms of partible inheritance, dower, and so on, as I have suggested in the past. On the other hand, although this may be plausible and might work in some cases, there is no necessity

<sup>57</sup> For analogous processes (sometimes of varying legality), see W. Goffart, *Barbarians and Romans, 418–584: The Techniques of Accommodation* (Princeton, 1980), pp.93–102; C. J. Wickham, 'European Forests in the Early Middle Ages: Landscape and Land Clearance', in Wickham, *Land and Power: Studies in Italian and European Social History, 400–1200* (London, 1994), pp.155–99 (pp.162–68).

<sup>58</sup> Halsall, *Settlement*, pp.269–70.

<sup>59</sup> *Lex Ribvaria* 35, 45, 68, ed. F. Beyerle and R. Buchner, MGH Legum Sect. I, 3 (Hannover, 1951). This also has an effect upon the raising of armies, the other key way in which early medieval kingdoms exacted dues from their subjects: Halsall, *Warfare*, pp.53–56.

to adduce it as a blanket explanation. The multiple landholding visible in, for example, the Wissembourg charters is not necessarily inconsistent with that of sixth- and seventh-century developments drawn above from the cemetery data. The extensive ownership of large shares of *villae*, attested by the charters, is commensurate with the increase in the power and security of local aristocrats in the seventh century.

What makes my earlier thesis more plausible, however, is the contrast with royal *villae*. These differed simply because the fiscal surplus from them had never been granted away, and had never been turned into outright lordship. Instead they remained in a direct relationship to the king and so could still be granted away whole, turning occupiers of the land into tenants, as I suggest had been done from the late sixth century. These grants are the visible ends of a process that had been going on for some time.

### *Conclusions*

The thesis set out above presents a model of the evolution from the Roman villa to the Merovingian through a process of internal dynamics and integration into wider social and political structures.<sup>60</sup> I also suggest how manmade landscape features provided foci for community identity and indeed for the dynamics that helped preserve this. The model presented here is of course not the only one possible. Most of the individual forms of evidence may be read in different ways. The present hypothesis has some advantages over the alternatives, however. The first is that it accounts for all of the different forms of evidence. Most other models concentrate upon one form of evidence and ignore the others. Second, it accounts for change through time, whereas other explanations have tended to aggregate data from the whole period between the fifth and ninth centuries, thus ironing out the situation's dynamism.

Questions and comparisons nevertheless remain. One of the most pressing is the comparison of the situation analysed above with the Anglo-Saxon case studies discussed elsewhere in this volume. It should be clear that, although more plentiful in Gaul, many of the forms of evidence, and the changes therein, as well as the patterns of data survival, are rather similar in northern Gaul and in lowland Britain. Might the explanations adduced here be considered in relation to Anglo-

<sup>60</sup> For some comments on the later history of the early medieval Frankish *villa*, see Fouracre, this volume.

Saxon evidence? The relationships between local community politics and those of wider politics can be seen in other case studies in this book, notably (if in slightly different ways) in the case studies of northern Spain. A final advantage of the model proposed here for northern Gallic developments over its alternatives is that it pays attention to very particular regional factors. Many other discussions have a tendency to assume that the situation was everywhere the same in the north of Gaul (and occasionally elsewhere too). The model proposed in this essay is not necessarily directly applicable elsewhere, but the dynamics and other factors that it identifies might profitably be considered in other regional studies.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>61</sup> In addition to general feedback from the other members of the 'People and Space' project, I am grateful to Steve Bassett, Wendy Davies and Chris Wickham for more detailed and very helpful comment on earlier drafts of this essay.



## COMMUNITY, IDENTITY AND THE LATER ANGLO-SAXON TOWN: THE CASE OF SOUTHERN ENGLAND

Grenville Astill

When and how did early medieval settlements gain a distinctive urban identity? And was it derived from the character of the settlement itself and/or through its relationship to its rural surroundings? The latter is particularly relevant to our people and places theme: it is important to consider the effect of urbanization on existing rural communities, and whether, for example, it changed the way communities organized or defined themselves.

The process of urbanization is seldom considered in such social ways, however, being more usually approached in economic or political terms. Towns have often been regarded as concentrations of wealth, which acted as centres of demand that integrated (and sometimes dominated) surrounding regions. The urban significance of a particular place is assessed by the extent to which it stimulated a coherent and articulated exchange system, indicated, for example, by the degree of specialized production within its hinterland which made different groups of producers economically reliant on each other. Alternatively, or concurrently, towns can be seen as an important means by which royal control was extended over a kingdom and facilitated the development of medieval states.<sup>1</sup>

In order to explore the impact of towns on the rural population we have to consider the social implications of urbanization. We need to return to the urban sequence, reviewing in particular the information for south-central England between

<sup>1</sup> D. Perring, *Town and Country in England: Frameworks for Archaeological Research* (York, 2002), pp.1–3; C. Wickham, 'Overview: Production, Distribution and Demand, II', in *The Long Eighth Century*, ed. I. L. Hansen and C. Wickham (Leiden, 2000), pp.345–77 (pp.372–73); R. Hodges, *The Anglo-Saxon Achievement* (London, 1989), pp.150–85.

the ninth and eleventh centuries, with the intention of examining the character of these 'urban' settlements, and what impact they had on their surrounding areas.

An urban sequence common to most of north-west Europe from at least the ninth century seems to have been established. The documentary, topographic and archaeological evidence makes it possible to identify settlements with a relatively diverse occupation structure that developed to serve the needs of aristocratic households, both secular and religious. In northern France and the Rhineland such settlements, it is suggested, had an initial 'manorial' phase of urbanization and trade, geared to the exchange of produce drawn from their (often far-flung) lands, and articulated by the estate agents and servants. In the course of the ninth century, production and exchange intensified, attracting the greater involvement of independent traders and the development of regional trade. The role of supranational and international trade in this sequence of urbanization is still debated, although recent attention has been more focussed on agricultural intensification, evidenced mainly from monastic estates, but also indicated indirectly from increasing evidence of tolls.<sup>2</sup>

From the later ninth century towns were also developing at a time of agrarian change, most particularly in terms of the fragmentation of large estates into smaller agricultural units, which supported a burgeoning lesser nobility. The changes also affected the peasantry, many of whom, especially in grain-producing areas, became more tied to the land and burdened with increased obligations.<sup>3</sup>

Despite these changes in agrarian structure, urbanization continued to be stimulated and dominated by aristocratic production and consumption until at least the late eleventh/early twelfth century, when there are signs that some of the urban population had achieved sufficient economic and political power to achieve a degree of independence. This trend had considerably accelerated by the later twelfth century, when there is extensive evidence for the increased commercialization of the countryside and a greater involvement of a large part of the population in the market.<sup>4</sup>

In France, where the scale and the chronology of such economic changes are debated, it is generally accepted that these took place at a time of political fragmentation, when a significant proportion of royal power, especially justice, had

<sup>2</sup> A. Verhulst, *The Rise of Cities in Northwest Europe* (Cambridge, 1999), pp.44–67.

<sup>3</sup> For example, R. Fossier, 'Rural Economy and Country Life', in *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. III: c.900–1024, ed. T. Reuter (Cambridge, 1999), pp.27–63 (pp.42–45, 50–53); R. Faith, *The English Peasantry and the Growth of Lordship* (Leicester, 1997), pp.153–77.

<sup>4</sup> D. Keene, 'Towns and the Growth of Trade', in *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. IV: c. 1024–1198, Part I, ed. D. Luscombe and J. Riley-Smith (Cambridge, 2004), pp.47–85 (pp.61–63); R. H. Britnell, *The Commercialisation of English Society, 1000–1500*, 2nd edn (Manchester, 1996), pp.79–101.

passed into the hands of those lesser aristocrats who controlled their localities. The focus of their power was often a castle, around which developed a 'seigneurie banale', a district in which the lord (often a former royal official responsible for public order) exercised power, using his own military might, for his own ends.<sup>5</sup>

England experienced similar economic changes, although rural restructuring and urban development is often related to the effects of a growing and centralizing state. The military reorganization instigated by the kings of Wessex in order to stem the Viking conquest is seen as initiating the political unification of England. A major consequence was the creation of a stable environment for economic activity, which was facilitated by a hierarchical infrastructure that administered law, maintained order, controlled a strong currency and supervised marketing. In such a situation, there is a predisposition, especially if a highly efficient or 'maximum' view of the Anglo-Saxon state is taken, to see towns as being initiated and imposed by royal fiat.<sup>6</sup>

That such diametrically opposed interpretations — French political fragmentation versus English political unification — are proposed for what are essentially the same economic changes should perhaps make us consider whether it is appropriate in this case to view socio-economic change in political terms.

There are also divergent views about the timing of English urbanization. Firstly, there is a short chronology of urban growth; in this scheme the process of state creation and military reorganization, usually attributed to Alfred in Wessex, took place at approximately the same time as increased productivity in the countryside. The *burhs*\* were commissioned as forts to prevent further Viking advances. But they were also intended to respond to the greater productivity by becoming regional economic centres for the exchange and manufacture of commodities. Such settlements were planned in Wessex by the late ninth century, and extended to the south-east and east midlands as the kingdom of Wessex expanded during the tenth century. Some towns, most notably Winchester, provide evidence of rapid urban growth during this time, in the form of a dense population and diverse occupational structure, but comparable and contemporary evidence appears to be extremely limited for the rest of south-central England.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> For example, T. N. Bisson, 'The "Feudal Revolution"', *Past and Present*, 142 (1994), 6–42; D. Barthélemy, 'Comment 1', and S. D. White, 'Comment 2', *Past and Present*, 152 (1996), 196–205 and 205–23; T. Reuter, 'Comment 3', C. Wickham, 'Comment 4', and T. N. Bisson, 'Reply', *Past and Present*, 155 (1997), 177–95, 196–208, and 208–25.

<sup>6</sup> For example, Hodges, *Anglo-Saxon Achievement*, pp.150–85; J. Campbell, 'The Late Anglo-Saxon State: A Maximum View', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 87 (1994), 39–65.

<sup>7</sup> M. Biddle, 'Towns', in *The Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. D. Wilson (London, 1976), pp.91–150 (pp.120–34); D. Russo, *Town Origins and Development in Early England, c.400–950 A.D.* (Westport, CN, 1998), pp.193–231.

The lack of comparable information for other *burhs* has prompted a second, and longer, chronology that separates in time the political and military purposes of the *burhs* from their economic functions. The *burhs* were part of a very successful military strategy, and continued as a potent symbol and instrument of a developing state. It is, however, difficult to detect evidence that the *burhs* had a simultaneous economic role. The archaeological and the numismatic material both point to a general increase in economic activity, but only from the later tenth or early eleventh century; this can be seen in the *burhs* themselves in terms of more intense occupation and industrial production. The *burhs*, then, had an important military and political role that was retained for perhaps as much as a century, and only after that did the settlements acquire further urban attributes.<sup>8</sup>

As both chronologies accept the initial military purpose of the *burhs*, it follows that they were superimposed on the landscape according to strategic criteria, including defensible locations and an even distribution to allow the majority of the population to take refuge within the defences. Our knowledge of the *burhs* is dominated by one document, the Burghal Hidage, which details how each fort was to be defended. There is a tendency to interpret the document as indicating an urban framework in Wessex that to a large extent remained unchanged during the medieval period. This is too static a view. Some forts may have existed before the Viking attacks and were incorporated into the scheme of defence. Likewise, there may have been much more potential for change in the military and urban arrangements during the tenth and eleventh centuries, for example by the commissioning of new forts during the raids in the early eleventh century.<sup>9</sup>

Just as a more dynamic view of military provision may be necessary, we may also need to take into consideration a similar fluidity in the urban process, from either the late ninth or late tenth century depending on which chronology — short or long — is preferred. But both interpretations adopt a primarily economic explanation of why some *burhs* became important centres: their success was dependent on the intensification of both agricultural production and trade. Both give little consideration to the act of imposing the *burhs* on Wessex — the military advantage would have been all too obvious, and once their success as forts had

<sup>8</sup> G. Astill, 'Towns and Town Hierarchies in Saxon England', *Oxford Journal of Archaeology*, 10 (1991), 95–117.

<sup>9</sup> D. Hill and A. Rumble, eds, *The Defence of Wessex: The Burghal Hidage and Anglo-Saxon Fortifications* (Manchester, 1996); N. P. Brooks, 'England in the Ninth Century: The Crucible of Defeat', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, 29 (1979), 1–20 (pp.17–19); Biddle, 'Towns', pp.140–41; D. Hill, 'Athelstan's Urban Reforms', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*, 11 (2000), 173–85.



been demonstrated, it is assumed that their value as a different kind of settlement would have been appreciated.

### *Wessex Before the Burhs*

What effect did the superimposition of the burghal network have on the existing social and political fabric of the south? Any recognition of the 'rural community' is through the evidence we have for the administrative arrangements, whereby people assembled at a particular location, drawn from a 'territory', for either or both secular and religious purposes.<sup>10</sup> In this sense the 'community' is an imposed identity, although it is possible that such units originated from assemblies and their catchment areas that had been established by common consent at an earlier time and for different purposes. Because the community was an administrative construct, it may only have comprised those who were important for the maintenance of peace and order in the regions, and did not therefore constitute the entire rural population. However, there is also a strong possibility that such administrative constructs could both cut across or indeed reflect the physical extent of existing communities.

In many regions a coincidence between ecclesiastical boundaries and those for secular administration — for example those that became later Anglo-Saxon **hundreds\*** — has been established. In Wessex and the midlands it has been possible partially to reconstruct a pattern of administrative and religious territories which were probably at least eighth-century.<sup>11</sup> At the core of the territories were two focal settlement types: the royal estate centre and the **minster\***. Royal estate centres are documented as administrative centres (some controlled by reeves) and collection points for food rents; some existed as hundredal centres by the tenth century.<sup>12</sup> However, before the ninth century there is sparse evidence for such foci: the most visible were the **shire\*** centres, which in Wessex existed by the mid-eighth century, but some appear to have declined in political and economic status

<sup>10</sup> Summarized for Wessex in B. Yorke, *Wessex in the Early Middle Ages* (Leicester, 1995), pp.123–32, and in A. Reynolds, *Later Anglo-Saxon England* (Stroud, 1999), pp.75–81.

<sup>11</sup> P. Hase, 'The Church in the Wessex Heartlands', in *The Medieval Landscape of Wessex*, ed. M. Aston and C. Lewis, Oxbow Monograph, 46 (Oxford, 1994), pp.47–81 (pp.61–69); P. Hase, 'The Mother Churches of Hampshire', in *Minsters and Parish Churches: The Local Church in Transition, 950–1200*, ed. J. Blair, Oxford University Committee for Archaeology, monograph 17 (Oxford, 1988), pp.45–66. See Bassett, this volume.

<sup>12</sup> P. Sawyer, 'The Royal *Tun* in Pre-Conquest England', in *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society*, ed. P. Wormald (Oxford, 1983), pp.273–99 (p.281).

by the ninth century (in the sense that their function seems to have been taken over by other places), such as Somerton, Dorchester and Hamtun.<sup>13</sup>

More emphasis is now laid on the minsters as local centres and incipient towns. The evidence tends to concentrate at the beginning and end of the minsters' sequence, from the charter material of the seventh and eighth century, after which there is often little information until Domesday or a chartered market or borough in the late twelfth or thirteenth century. The 'territories' or **parishes**\* of minsters continue to be reconstructed, and their extents often coincide with the boundaries of tenth-century hundreds which, it is argued, probably reflected earlier administrative units. The rural communities identified with the places at the centre of these 'territories' as their religious, economic and, if these places also contained royal estate centres, administrative foci. Where there was no such coincidence, there was some overlapping of 'territories' (for example, where a single hundred had the same extent as a number of adjacent minster parishes), and so more places for the communities to assemble.<sup>14</sup>

Coin finds from minster and royal sites, beginning in the late seventh century with *sceattas*\*, support the claim that such places functioned as consumption and collecting centres of agricultural surplus derived from their estates and 'territories'. *Sceattas* are also found at locations which indicate more informal places for sporadic exchange such as road and river crossings and hill forts.<sup>15</sup> In addition, some rural sites in eastern England have substantial quantities of metalwork as well as coins — the 'productive sites'. This range of sites could indicate that there was a variety, perhaps even a hierarchy, of production and exchange centres that may also have supplied commodities to the coastal and estuarine emporia. Such an economic relationship may be implied by the extensive distribution of Ipswich ware, a pottery produced at that emporium. It has also been argued that there is a strong association between concentrated finds of metalwork and religious sites. Most of this material, however, cannot be dated later than the mid-ninth century, and there is sparse evidence for such places existing between the mid-ninth and eleventh centuries.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> J. Blair, 'Small Towns, 600–1270', in *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, vol. 1: 600–1540, ed. D. Palliser (Cambridge, 2000), pp.245–70 (pp.248–49); J. Campbell, 'Power and Authority', in *ibid.*, pp.51–78 (p.52).

<sup>14</sup> Blair, 'Small Towns', pp.250–53; Bassett, this volume.

<sup>15</sup> D. M. Metcalf, 'Monetary Circulation in Southern England in the First Half of the Eighth Century', in *Sceattas in England and the Continent*, ed. D. Hill and D. M. Metcalf (Oxford, 1984), pp.27–71.

<sup>16</sup> J. Moreland, 'The Significance of Production in Eighth-Century England', in *Long Eighth Century*, ed. Hansen and Wickham, pp.69–104 (pp.87–98); B. Palmer, 'The Hinterlands of

A significant proportion of minsters have consistent topographic locations near roads and on promontories overlooking rivers, often confluences. Ovoid or circular elements in settlement plans are often interpreted as indicating minster enclosures, as at Bampton (Oxfordshire).<sup>17</sup> A limited amount of archaeological fieldwork has been done on a small number of minster sites. Bicester parish church, for example, is thought to have been a minster. A section of a ditched inner enclosure was located and burials were recovered to the north of the church, and interpreted as part of a large cemetery extending from the church. To the east the church overlooks the River Bure. The later, twelfth- or thirteenth-century, town is located on the other, eastern bank of the river, and the two areas were probably linked by a ford or causeway. Excavations to the south of the medieval market place, in Bury End, revealed five substantial timber buildings, dated between the later tenth and twelfth centuries. These are interpreted as part of a 'proto-town' that was developing at a short distance from an older monastic nucleus across the river. As the buildings were on a different location and orientation from the later medieval town, the settlement was probably moved and replanned with burgage plots and a market place in the twelfth century.<sup>18</sup>

The Bicester sequence is reminiscent of the more extensively excavated Steyning, where there was a minster from at least the ninth century. The area to the south and west of the church was occupied during the eleventh century with low-density, scattered, timber buildings and rubbish pits, with an enclosed area to the east, a possible high-status residence. Unequivocal urban characteristics are difficult to identify here, and it is likely that such settlements only experienced more intense activity when markets were held. The Domesday entry hints at this with Steyning's 'eight burgesses living as villeins'. It is possible the eleventh-century phase of settlement may be related to the time when some minsters had been disendowed — the holdings of the church in the Domesday entry seem small. We may be seeing a secularization of the urban process, which might explain the relatively late creation

Three Southern English *Emporia*: Some Common Themes', in *Markets in Early Medieval Europe: Trading and 'Productive' Sites, 650–850*, ed. T. Pestell and K. Ulmschneider (Macclesfield, 2003), pp.48–60; K. Ulmschneider, 'Settlement, Economy and the "Productive" Site in Anglo-Saxon Lincolnshire, AD 650–780', *Medieval Archaeology*, 44 (2000), 53–79.

<sup>17</sup> Blair, 'Small Towns', pp.250–55. However, dating of such features is difficult and secular sites also had ovoid enclosures, as at Trowbridge: A. Graham and S. Davies, *Excavations in Trowbridge, Wiltshire, 1977 and 1986–88* (Salisbury, 1993).

<sup>18</sup> J. Blair, 'Anglo-Saxon Bicester: The Minster and the Town', *Oxoniensia*, 67 (2002), 133–40.

of a mint in the 1020s.<sup>19</sup> Such secularized places may have been chosen as mints as part of a royal policy to recognize or control small towns — indicated in that category of place mentioned in Edgar's laws that needed twelve witnesses for transactions (the same as for hundreds), rather than the thirty-six expected for large towns.<sup>20</sup> Places such as Steyning were important religious and economic centres for their regions, often shown in Domesday and confirmed later by a replanning of the settlement in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (see Fig. 11.1).

We are thus dealing with small-scale urbanization, similar to the initial phases of north European town development mentioned at the beginning. It is also 'small-scale' in the sense that these places were related to religious and/or administrative territories that were smaller than the shire, many of which may later have been renamed as hundreds from the late tenth century. The sparse archaeological evidence shows an intensification of settlement centring on the eleventh century, perhaps related to the disendowment of some minsters and an increasing royal interest. A major task for the future will be to discover the character of these settlements in the ninth and tenth centuries.

### *The Burhs*

By the later ninth century this network of small-scale centres was augmented by the *burhs*, the 'planned scheme of national defence' recorded in the Burghal Hidage (c.914–18). The locations of most *burhs* have been identified, although few have been excavated extensively, and dating remains problematic.<sup>21</sup>

*Burhs* were primarily military constructions strategically located, and sited to offer shelter for most of the population: nowhere was further than 30 km from a *burh*. The *burhs* are customarily classified as towns or forts, the latter being those sites which had an entirely military and perhaps short-lived purpose. That some forts had characteristics similar to planned towns of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries encouraged the view that they were also created as towns. Size and a regular

<sup>19</sup> M. Gardiner and C. Greatorex, 'Archaeological Excavations in Steyning, 1992–95: Further Evidence for the Evolution of a Late Saxon Small Town', *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, 135 (1997), 143–71. Similar but more limited evidence has come from Milborne Port, the site of a minster and royal estate centre: A. Smith, 'Medieval Archaeological Features at Church Street, Milborne Port', *Somerset Archaeology and Natural History*, 146 (2003), 37–46.

<sup>20</sup> Yorke, *Wessex*, pp.236–38; *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, ed. F. Liebermann (Halle, 1903), p.210.

<sup>21</sup> Biddle, 'Towns', p.124.

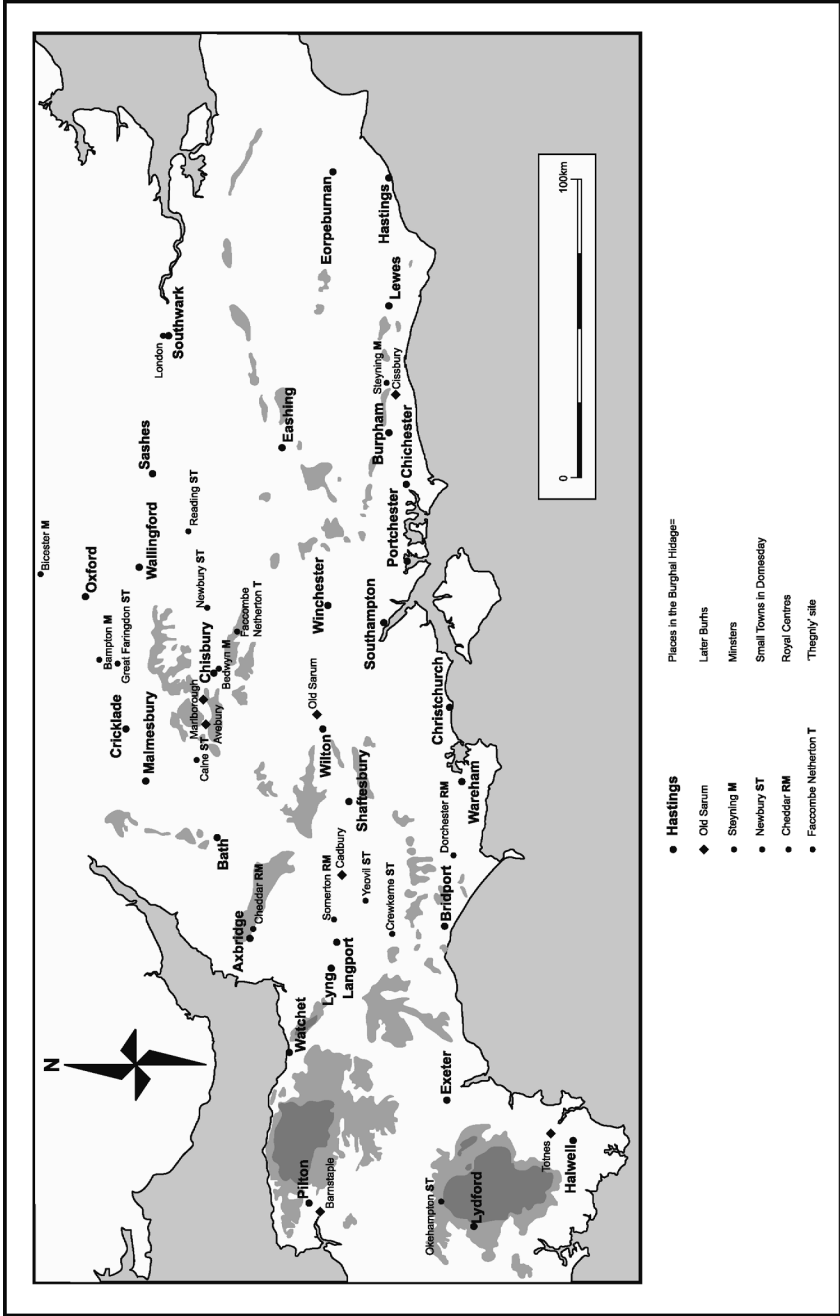


Figure 11.1. Places mentioned in the text.

street system are such characteristics. The sites selected as *burhs* included walled Roman towns and existing small-scale central places. Some were regularly planned on open ground; others had their streets laid to accommodate the topography, usually on promontories.<sup>22</sup> A high proportion were founded on royal land, which initially may have facilitated the victualling of the garrison by earmarking food rents. A variation apparent in the initial scheme was to locate the *burh* on a royal estate, but at a distance from the estate centre. This may just reflect the strategically unsuitable location of some estate centres, but it should remind us that, while the concentration of administrative, military and religious functions in one place was becoming common, it was by no means invariable and such functions could be dispersed among nearby settlements. Somerset has the most examples, such as the minster and shire centre at Somerton and the fort at Langport, or the minster and royal estate centre at Cheddar and the fort at Axbridge.<sup>23</sup>

In such defensive schemes the fort may have been the element most susceptible to change, and revised military plans or a new threat could cause the relocation of garrisons. The renewed Viking attacks in the early eleventh century led to the re-commissioning of the hill forts at South Cadbury and Old Sarum.<sup>24</sup> In some cases, for example in Devon, royal confiscation and exchange of land was necessary in order to build new forts such as Oldaport to control the county's south coast and its major estuaries. A similar process of royally enforced land acquisition has been reconstructed as the prelude to Edward the Elder's *burh*-building programme in the east midlands.<sup>25</sup> The fluidity in the burghal network, or evidence for its rearrangement, has been claimed in those cases where some forts were apparently abandoned for another location, such as Halwell for Totnes, Pilton for Barnstaple, and perhaps the Avebury and Chisbury forts for Marlborough, but the evidence for any relationship between these pairs of sites has yet to be presented.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Biddle, 'Towns', pp.124–37.

<sup>23</sup> Also Williton the estate centre and Watchet the fort: M. Aston, 'The Towns of Somerset', in *Anglo-Saxon Towns in Southern England*, ed. J. Haslam (Chichester, 1984), pp.167–201 (pp.188, 173–74). Examples also occurred in Wiltshire, e.g. Bedwyn and Chisbury (fort): J. Haslam, 'The Towns of Wiltshire', in *Anglo-Saxon Towns in Southern England*, ed. Haslam, pp.87–147 (pp.94–102).

<sup>24</sup> Biddle, 'Towns', pp.140–41.

<sup>25</sup> P. Rainbird, 'Oldaport and the Anglo-Saxon Defence of Devon', *Proceedings of the Devon Archaeological Society*, 56 (1988), 153–64; R. Fleming, 'Monastic Lands and England's Defence in the Viking Age', *English Historical Review*, 100 (1985), 247–65.

<sup>26</sup> Compare T. Slater, 'The South-West of England', in *Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, vol. 1, ed. Palliser, pp.583–607 (pp.590–91).

Changing military needs, and in some cases the separation of military, religious and administrative functions, may have meant that this royal burghal initiative did not, or was not intended to, fit so easily into the older network of regional centres. There may be no great surprise at this conclusion if the initiative is regarded as essentially military, as long as we think of the Burghal Hidage as merely one record of military organization at one particular time, and that that organization could change dramatically according to later military needs.

However, if the *burhs* were intended from the outset to be towns, then their economic success would depend on a close integration with the networks of trade that had already been established. We need, therefore, to try to assess the economic character of the *burhs*, and how that changed between the late ninth and the eleventh centuries.

### *The Economic Character of the Burhs*

Winchester is exceptional in the amount of historical and archaeological attention it has received: the range and the quality of the information demonstrates that by the late ninth century it had urban characteristics. A major seat of royal and episcopal authority, it could claim to be a capital until the eleventh century. Much of the economic activity may well have been geared to serving the needs of elite groups and had at its heart craft production and the distribution of agricultural surplus from the estates of religious communities and secular lords. It is generally thought that the intramural areas became densely populated, and that suburbs began to develop from the late ninth century, when there is also evidence of diverse occupations. However, some take the view that this increased activity may still have been mainly associated with, and dependent upon, the churches and palaces, and that Winchester did not become a large town until 'well into the tenth century'.<sup>27</sup>

It is more difficult to assess the character of the other Wessex *burhs*, but first it is worth recalling the evidence for royal intention and coercion. From the early tenth century the laws show a clear concern to supervise trade, to judge from the emphasis on witnessing transactions and preventing theft. Edward the Elder tried to concentrate all trade into 'ports', but Athelstan's, Edgar's and Cnut's laws seem to acknowledge that other places existed beyond direct royal control for small-

<sup>27</sup> M. Biddle and D. Keene, 'General Survey and Conclusions', in *Winchester in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. M. Biddle (Oxford, 1976), pp.449–508 (pp.452–54); D. Hinton, 'The Large Towns, 600–1300', in *Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, vol. 1, ed. Palliser, pp.217–43 (p.226).

scale trading and allowed them to continue. It was stipulated that borough courts were also to be held three times a year that should have ensured that suitors came to town. But, whereas the *burhs* outside Wessex were also the shire centres, and therefore the shire and borough courts were held in the same place, there was no such coincidence in the south; there was therefore potentially less cause for those representatives of the rural population to acknowledge that the *burhs* had a major place in their lives.<sup>28</sup>

One of the major reasons obliging people to visit *burhs* would have been to obtain coin, presumably in exchange for commodities they had produced, in order to pay taxes. From the 920s there is a steady growth in the number of mints that were founded in *burhs*, and this reflects the royal determination to control the coinage, and to supervise and protect the moneyers and their bullion. Viewed in the light of the legislation regarding trade, it is further evidence of an attempt to extend royal control over the local economy. The ability successfully to exercise this level of control is dependent on how effective the Anglo-Saxon state had become.<sup>29</sup>

Whether the legislation reflected a high level of trading might be checked by using coin distributions. The number of coins in circulation during the later ninth and most of the tenth century was limited. The loss rate of coins in this period was considerably less than that of *sceattas* in the eighth century, and this would argue for a reduced level of trading during most of the tenth century. The eighth-century level of coin loss was not regained in the south of England until the last quarter of the tenth century at the earliest, perhaps not until the twelfth century (Fig. 11.2). Such a reduced level of trading is confirmed to a certain extent by the remarkable dearth of imported pottery from most inland sites, and even ports, including London. Rhenish and French pottery reappeared in London and other ports in the eleventh century.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Discussed in H. Loyn, 'Towns in Late Anglo-Saxon England: The Evidence and Some Possible Lines of Enquiry', in *England before the Conquest*, ed. P. Clemoes and K. Hughes (Cambridge 1971), pp.115–28; P. Wormald, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century* (Oxford, 1999), pp.289–90, 319–20.

<sup>29</sup> T. Reuter, 'The Making of England and Germany, 850–1050: Points of Comparison and Difference', in *Medieval Europeans*, ed. A. Smyth (Basingstoke, 1998), pp.53–70.

<sup>30</sup> D. Hinton, 'Coins and Commercial Centres in Anglo-Saxon England', in *Anglo-Saxon Monetary History*, ed. M. Blackburn (Leicester, 1986), pp.11–26 (p.18); M. Blackburn, '“Productive” Sites and the Pattern of Coin Loss in England, 600–1180', in *Markets in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. Pestell and Ulmschneider, pp.20–36 (pp.31–32); A. Vince, *Saxon London: An Archaeological Investigation* (London, 1990), pp.106–08.



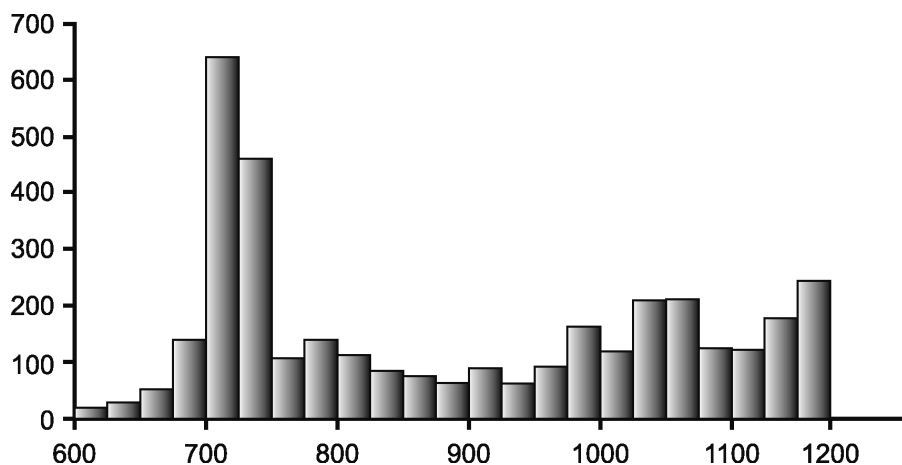


Figure 11.2. Single-coin finds from southern England (after Blackburn, “‘Productive’ Sites and the Pattern of Coin Loss in England”, p.32).

Coins and imported pottery, however, may only indicate interregional and international trade, and it is possible that the *burhs* had become established as local, intraregional exchange centres. Local pottery is not sufficiently distinctive, nor produced in *burhs* sufficiently often at this time, to be used to estimate the extent or intensity of local trade. The best guide available is to look at the *burhs* themselves and see whether the range and character of occupation is similar to that found at Winchester. The relatively few excavations that have taken place in the intramural areas of *burhs* have shown little evidence for intensive occupation, illustrated most clearly by the extensive empty, unoccupied, areas in Cricklade and Christchurch. Similarly, there is no clear sign of residential or industrial occupation — even the frontages lining the cardinal streets of *burhs* such as Wallingford remained empty.<sup>31</sup>

The tenth century, then, appears to be the lost century for the *burhs* of Wessex. The success at repulsing the Vikings meant that there was less need of the *burhs* for their primary, defensive, purpose and they had yet to fulfil the urban aspirations which may also have been intended when they were constructed in the late ninth century. The *burhs* did not possess the necessary attributes for substantial urban growth, nor did their location and function coincide sufficiently with the existing old pattern of centres for assembly and trading to benefit from its continued existence.

<sup>31</sup> Excavation results from individual *burhs* are summarized in Astill, ‘Towns and Town Hierarchies’, pp.104–08.

The *burhs* may have been perceived by the majority of the rural population as not being any more economically differentiated than the older central places, different only in symbolizing the coercion and control of the growing state.

The ambivalent status of *burhs* may also be illustrated by the revision of the dioceses in Wessex in 909. Three new bishops' seats were created, none within *burhs*: Wells and Crediton, where minsters were promoted to cathedrals, and the same is probably true of Ramsbury. Similarly the male reformed monasteries were located elsewhere, with the exception of Winchester.<sup>32</sup> It seems that royal intention to keep bishops and *burhs* apart in Wessex overrode any economic or political advantage that could have been gained by having episcopal households in towns, as was to happen soon after the Norman Conquest.

If we are questioning whether *burhs* fulfilled their economic, and specifically urban, aspirations, we should go on to ask who were these settlements for and what happened in them. The *burhs*' military purpose required a large aristocratic involvement, specifically in terms of leading, providing and provisioning the garrison. The association with the royal effort was underpinned by grants of holdings in the *burhs* to thegns and higher members of the aristocracy. Documented for Winchester from the ninth century, the grant-giving is reflected in the Domesday entries for other *burhs*, and is often thought to indicate an earlier arrangement associated with the burghal defensive measures. Indeed some think that the extent of aristocratic interest in *burhs* was under-recorded.<sup>33</sup> The holdings, 'urban manors', were large plots with buildings in the centre, as reconstructed for tenth-century Oxford (Fig. 11.3) and Winchester. Occupation of this type might also explain the proliferation of urban churches as many could have originated as private **chapels**\* for noble households. Thegns also commonly acted as royal agents in towns, especially as moneyers and as borough reeves, and it seems that a higher proportion of those thegns with urban connections or obligations continued to hold office after the Norman Conquest compared to their rural counterparts.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup> It is also perhaps significant that the practice of using relics 'to create a sense of identity for each town' in west Mercia was not followed in Wessex: J. Barrow, 'Churches, Education and Literacy in Towns, 600–1300', in *Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, vol. 1, ed. Palliser, pp.127–52 (p.130).

<sup>33</sup> Biddle and Keene, 'General Survey and Conclusions', p.457; J. Blair, *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire* (Stroud, 1994), p.117; N. Baker and R. Holt, 'The City of Worcester in the Tenth Century', in *St Oswald of Worcester: Life and Influence*, ed. N. Brooks and C. Cubitt (Leicester, 1996), pp.129–46 (p.140).

<sup>34</sup> Blair, *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire*, pp.152–56, 163; R. Fleming, 'Rural Elites and Urban Communities in Late-Saxon England', *Past and Present*, 141 (1993), 3–37; J. Campbell, *The Anglo-Saxon State* (London, 2000), pp.xxv, 191–92.

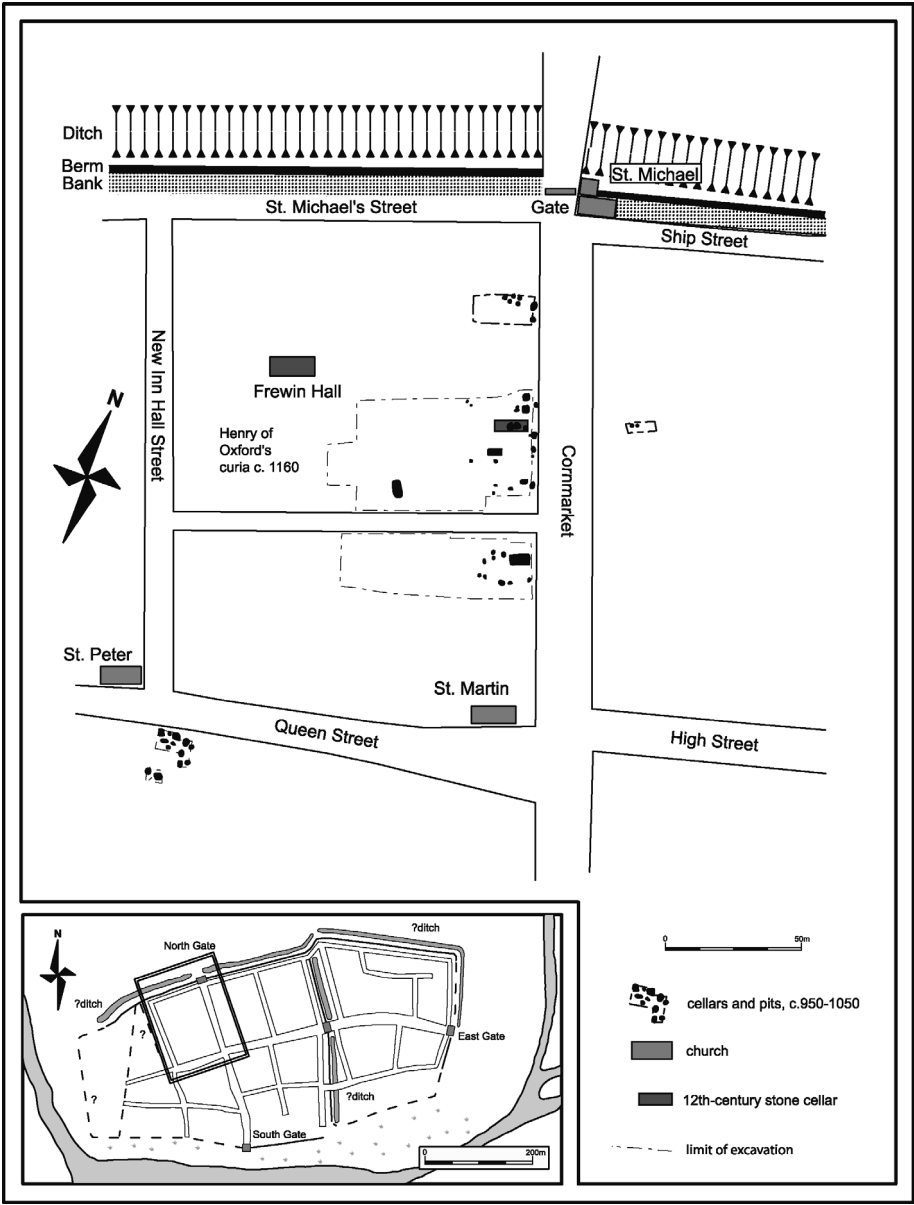


Figure 11.3. The north-west part of Oxford in the tenth to twelfth centuries (after Blair, *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire*, p.156).

Aristocratic interest in towns also has an archaeological dimension. The loss rate of coins in *burhs*, for example, is most similar to that from 'thegnly' rural residences, suggesting that until the late tenth century *burhs* were barely differentiated from rural estate centres in terms of trading. A further similarity between these locations can be seen in industrial activities, especially metalworking. The 'thegnly' sites such as Faccombe Netherton in Hampshire have evidence for metalworking, particularly whitesmithing using gold, silver enamel and glass — similar activities to that from Winchester and Oxford, in areas interpreted as urban manors. In both rural and urban locations the scale and character of the metalworking indicates a craftsman working to satisfy the demands of a patron rather than mass production for a wider clientele.<sup>35</sup>

Domesday has been used to demonstrate the character and scale of aristocratic involvement in towns, but it can also be interpreted as suggesting that by the later eleventh century this association was diminishing. By 1086 some thegns had started to lease their urban properties, and others were taking the initiative and founding their own small markets, as at Newbury, Crewkerne, Great Faringdon, Yeovil and Okehampton.<sup>36</sup>

Both trends could indicate the changing character of towns. From the late tenth century more people were living in *burhs*: street frontages were colonized, often with buildings that have timber-lined cellars — the first specifically urban form of medieval architecture for at least six hundred years — at Wallingford, Oxford (Fig. 11.3), Chichester and Exeter. Potteries and industries based on rural surplus such as tanning, bone-working and wood-working became established, apparently for the first time, in the late tenth to early eleventh century. Such evidence, and the coins, show that the *burhs* were becoming towns in the sense that they were gaining a variety of occupations and a dense population, and were interacting with the surrounding area in a much more intense and reciprocal way. The large towns also had a mixed population, with increasingly diverse social and ethnic groupings, indicated by the dedications and number of the parish churches. Diverse and wide-ranging contacts also resumed, to judge from the reappearance of imported pottery, particularly from northern France and the Rhineland.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Hinton, 'Coins and Commercial Centres', pp.18–22, 23–24; J. Fairbrother, *Faccombe Netherton: Excavations of a Saxon and Medieval Manorial Complex* (London, 1990), pp.244–72.

<sup>36</sup> Baker and Holt, 'City of Worcester', p.140; Fleming, 'Rural Elites', pp.16–17; Slater, 'South-West of England', p.594.

<sup>37</sup> The details of individual towns are summarized in Astill, 'Towns and Town Hierarchies', pp.103–08.

Suburban development was a further sign of urban growth, spreading along the major access routes. The building of gateway chapels, now usually dated to the eleventh century, may indicate a growing self-consciousness among the townspeople. The eleventh-century rebuilding of the defences at Wareham, Wallingford, Cricklade and Christchurch, for example, are usually seen as a response to the renewed Scandinavian raids and settlement. However, the refurbished defences, for the first time in stone, could be a further indication that the *burhs* were becoming consciously and economically differentiated from the countryside in general and the small-scale centres in particular.<sup>38</sup>

The urban momentum established by 1000 is usually portrayed as continuing throughout the later eleventh and twelfth centuries, and beyond into the thirteenth, when the earliest surviving borough records confirm the situation. The exception was the period immediately following the Norman Conquest when there is a dramatic, but short-lived, dislocation associated with the destruction of urban sectors in order to make way for the new castles and relocated cathedrals. It was short-lived, and was offset by the advantage of having to supply a greater range of high-status households than before, now that religious and political institutions had been brought together in towns for the first time.<sup>39</sup>

However, some aspects of the sparse archaeological record indicate that the post-Conquest dislocation could also have initiated a process of de-urbanization that lasted for a large part of the twelfth century. Firstly, it seems that the industrial basis of the urban economy was not necessarily that secure. Pottery and metalworking, established and becoming identified as specifically urban activities by the eleventh century, are not easily found in twelfth-century towns; they appear to have declined or even disappeared during that century. Just as production is reduced, so apparently is consumption, for there are fewer twelfth-century portable finds, such as base-metal jewellery, than previously and the same has been noted for bone items such as combs. The relative scarcity of mass-produced material, some of it dependent on raw materials drawn from the countryside, indicates that the century-old relationship between towns and their hinterlands may not have been that well established, and that the attraction of the town as a marketing, administrative and entertainment centre was not necessarily that strong. The twelfth-century town may still have been sustained economically by acting primarily as a supplier for its institutional residents.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Barrow, 'Churches', pp.137–38; G. Astill, 'General Survey 600–1300', in *Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, vol. I, ed. Palliser, pp.27–49 (p.41).

<sup>39</sup> Astill, 'General Survey', p.44.

<sup>40</sup> Astill, 'General Survey', pp.45–46; Hinton, 'Large Towns', p.235.

Apart from the substantial buildings occupied by these high-status households, twelfth-century structures are remarkably elusive in most towns. While due allowance has to be made for the difficulties of survival, it is possible that this chronological horizon of buildings was more ephemeral and consisted of earth-fast timber structures, similar to their rural counterparts, and perhaps providing another sign of a de-urbanization process. The timber-lined cellared buildings did not continue to be built in the twelfth century, leaving a hiatus until the construction of stone cellared and vaulted buildings later in the century.<sup>41</sup>

The state also had a deleterious impact on the towns. William I imposed a massive increase of tax on moneyers, from £200–250 to £750–1000, while the numbers who were exempt from taxation rose considerably, particularly the king's followers and Norman townspeople. The effect was to increase the fiscal burden on an urban society that was already heavily taxed, and contributed to the stultification of the economy. Silver shortages between c.1050 and 1160 also contributed to the potential economic stagnation, and the low loss-rate of coins in towns during this period would indicate less intense levels of general trading. The number of mints was progressively reduced from sixty-five in 1083–86 to twenty in the 1130s to nine in 1189. In some later tenth-century towns the archaeology shows that moneyers were also engaged in general metalworking, and the connection might help explain this later general decline in urban industry.<sup>42</sup>

### *Urban Hinterlands*

We need to return to an issue raised at the beginning: whether urban identity can be established through a settlement's relationship with its region. It has already been approached obliquely in the sense that urban economic vitality is often to be seen in the kind of interaction the settlement had with its hinterland, and it is clear that the relationship was by no means stable between the late ninth and eleventh centuries. Most discussions about hinterlands are based on the assumption that they were commensurate with the size or complexity of the towns, and that, once established, the town-hinterland relationship developed in an evolutionary way.<sup>43</sup> The sequence suggested here, however, does not confirm these hypotheses; rather, for a considerable time the *burhs* and their occupants were unsure of their status because the relationship with their region had not been settled, and it was

<sup>41</sup> J. Grenville, *Medieval Housing* (Leicester, 1997), pp.175–81.

<sup>42</sup> P. Stafford, *Unification and Conquest* (London, 1989), p.216; Hinton, 'Large Towns', p.235.

<sup>43</sup> Perring, *Town and Country in England*, pp.1–3.

by no means certain that the *burhs* functioned as significant administrative, religious or economic centres during the tenth century.

The eleventh century was a critical time, when the potential for the development of an urban identity was being realized, but was that identity sufficiently established to survive a de-urbanization phase in the twelfth century? Urban distinctiveness and town-country interaction may well have been dependent on the extent of continued royal supervision or intervention. The military origins, the fact that moneyers and other royal agents were located in places which had separate, borough, courts should indicate that the *burhs* were treated in a special way, but not perhaps invariably. Stafford has reconstructed, mainly from Domesday, the royal estates which supplied food rents for maintaining the royal court — the farm of one night. She argues that at the time of the Confessor the rents in Somerset, Dorset, Wiltshire and probably Hampshire were so large that they were still intended to provide for the whole court. The groups of estates identified for this purpose were not just agriculturally productive, but also provided additional income from the hundredal courts and the *burhs* which lay within those estates; that is, all the income that was available from the area was to be used. In these cases any separate identity that the *burhs* or hundreds had was ignored, and both were treated as merely a source of income.<sup>44</sup>

Domesday is also commonly used to reconstruct the hinterlands of towns, mainly from the arrangements by which urban holdings were attached to rural manors — the ‘urban fields’. The extent and number of the rural manors that had interests in any one town is taken as a guide to the status of that town, and thus some impression of an urban hierarchy can be gained to complement that gained from numismatic data. Winchester, Cricklade, Oxford and Wallingford had many dependencies that were spread as far as 40–50 km away, and in the case of the latter two over several county boundaries. At the other extreme there were Reading, Calne and Christchurch with one or two attached rural manors within a radius of 6 km or less: the latter pattern is more typical of the west Wessex towns (Fig. 11.4).<sup>45</sup> Another indication of a town’s influence over its surroundings could be gained from the few surviving guild documents that record the distance over which the guilds attracted people. Members of the Exeter guild lived up to 25 km away from the city, while the Bedwyn guild in the early tenth century made provision for collecting a member for burial in the *burh* from up to 80 km away.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>44</sup> P. Stafford, ‘The “Farm of One Night” and the Organization of King Edward’s Estates in Domesday’, *Economic History Review*, 33 (1980), 491–502.

<sup>45</sup> H. Darby, *Domesday England* (Cambridge, 1977), pp.309–13.

<sup>46</sup> G. Rosser, ‘The Anglo-Saxon Gilds’, in *Minsters and Parish Churches*, ed. Blair, pp.31–34.

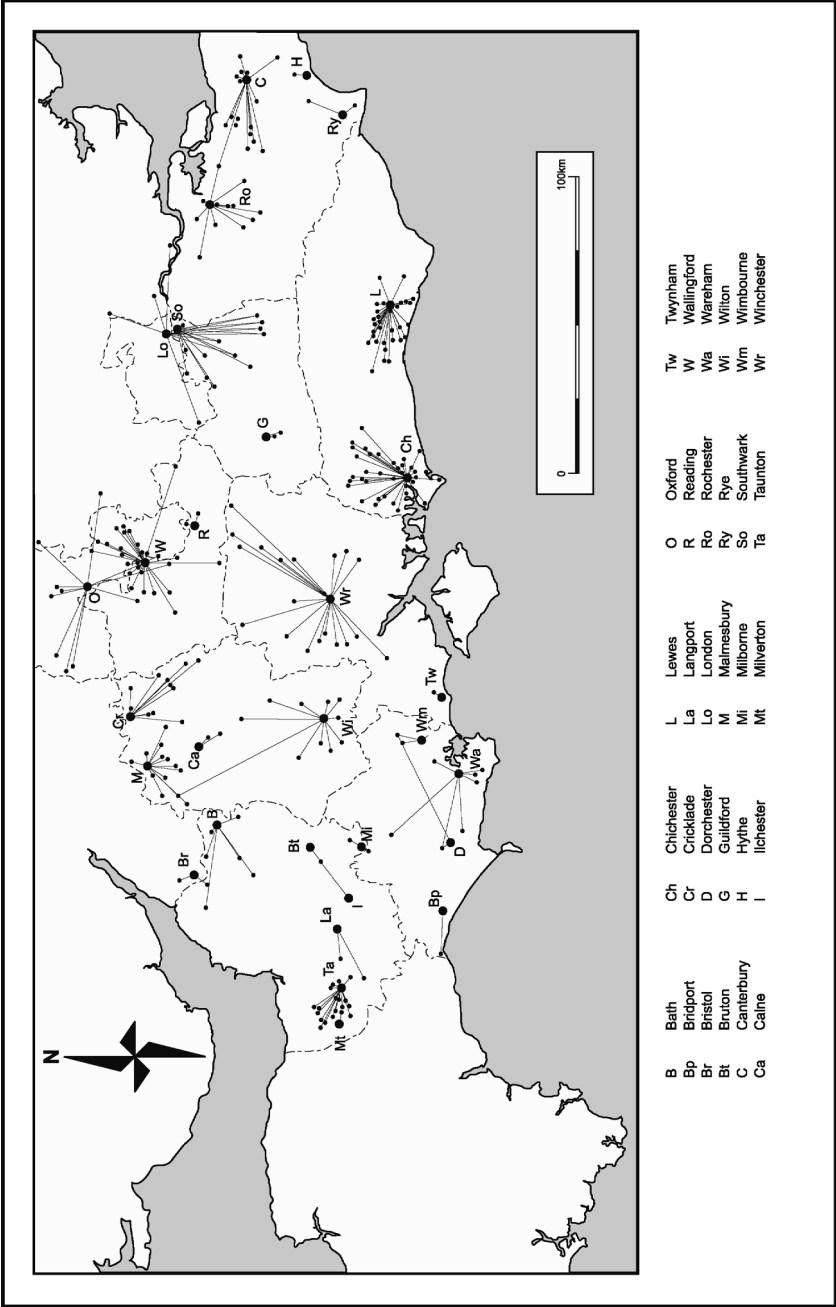


Figure 11.4. 'Urban fields' in southern England (after Darby, *Domesday England*, pp.311–13).



The most plentiful source for characterizing hinterlands are the coins. After Edgar's reform of 973, the coinage was standardized, every issue had the names of the moneyer and the mint, and on average the coinage was replaced every six years. We therefore have evidence with good chronological and locational control. However, coin distributions reflect at least two major functions of coinage — taxation and trade — and so cannot be treated in the same way as, for example, pottery; for this reason numismatists correctly warn that coins cannot be used to write economic history. Coins have, however, been used to produce a ranking of mints, expressed as a percentage of total known moneyers, which has also been taken as a guide to the urban hierarchy of late tenth- and eleventh-century England. It is skewed towards eastern England which reflects the employment of a greater number of moneyers at the ports, where foreign coin was converted into legal tender. That there is some economic reality to the importance of the east is reflected in the distribution of single-find coins, with a marked westward decline in numbers, indicating that monetization decreased the further west one went.<sup>47</sup>

The size of the currency was far in excess of what was needed for exchange: sixty mints were provided whereas perhaps only twenty were necessary, an indication that coins were not just used for trading but for taxation and as a store of wealth. Between 973 and 1086 ten mints accounted for two-thirds of the coins, with London producing 20% — this statistic alone indicates the difficulty of establishing regional patterns. However, there were varying weight standards operating within England, within groups of shires. Metcalf has identified seven regional circulations based on weight, and these have been confirmed by alloy analysis, showing that the distinctiveness of the localities remained even though large amounts of coin must have been taken out of the region as tax.<sup>48</sup> That towns and their surrounding countryside had a similar proportion of coins originating from the same range of mints could be taken as evidence of a significant interaction within particular regions. Fractions — assumed to be used for small-scale transactions — are not found in greater abundance in the towns. Wessex is unusual as a region because it has a greater number of mints compared to its share of national output (8–10%). Many mints are represented by a small number of

<sup>47</sup> R. Dolley and D. M. Metcalf, 'The Reform of the English Coinage under Edgar', in *Anglo-Saxon Coins*, ed. R. Dolley (London, 1961), pp. 136–68; D. Hill, *An Atlas of Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1981), pp. 130–31; D. M. Metcalf, *An Atlas of Anglo-Saxon and Norman Coin Finds, c. 973–1086* (London, 1998), p. 34.

<sup>48</sup> Stafford, *Unification and Conquest*, p. 142; Metcalf, *Atlas of Anglo-Saxon and Norman Coin Finds*, pp. 19, 46.

coins, and so many may have operated sporadically. The small mints were serviced by moneyers from the main town who travelled around the region. Exeter had up to fifteen subsidiary mints in Devon and Somerset, yet it seems that only five mints were used in any one issue.<sup>49</sup> Coin distributions cannot be used for reconstructing individual urban hinterlands because a substantial number of coins were withdrawn from a region in the process of taxation and therefore cannot reflect the economic potential of individual towns. There is then potential for refining regional coin-using practices rather than those for a particular place.

A similar conclusion has to be drawn from the region's pottery. We know that some towns, such as Exeter and Winchester, had resident potters and the products were well-produced, but the distribution is quite limited and bears little relationship to, for example, their 'urban fields' which suggests a level of non-economic control was being applied to these products. Conversely, the coarsewares were very widely distributed throughout Wessex: one type was used from Christchurch in the west to Chichester in the east. It may be that sub-groups have yet to be differentiated within the common coarsewares which would allow a more local view of distribution, but at the moment the ceramic data can give few insights into urban hinterlands.<sup>50</sup>

To recapitulate, it is difficult to isolate obvious signs of an urban identity among the larger towns in the south between the late ninth and eleventh centuries. This may be partly explained by a 'long chronology' of urbanization where the development of clearly urban characteristics was drawn out and faltering. But there were other contributory factors: the fluidity in the arrangements of the 'burghal system' — where urban functions were not only sometimes divided amongst two or three settlements, but also illustrated by the amount of rationalization, leading to the abandonment of some sites and the promotion or creation of others — may have been underestimated. And lastly we need to consider the extent to which the *burhs* of the late ninth century were successfully accommodated within the older, pre-*burh*, pattern of trading and assembly places, increasingly recognized as having been based on royal centres and minsters. In particular, we may need to take more seriously the possibility that this older pattern, despite royal efforts to the contrary, continued to determine the social and economic relationships of the majority of the population.

<sup>49</sup> Metcalf, *Atlas of Anglo-Saxon and Norman Coin Finds*, pp.83, 246–48.

<sup>50</sup> M. Mellor, *Medieval Ceramic Studies in England* (London 1994), pp.72–76; D. H. Brown, 'Pottery and Late Saxon Southampton', *Proceedings of the Hampshire Field Club and Archaeological Society*, 50 (1995), 127–52 (pp.133, 143–45); D. H. Brown, *Pottery in Medieval Southampton c.1066–1510* (York, 2002), pp.8, 127.

## MARMOUTIER: *FAMILIA* VERSUS FAMILY. THE RELATIONS BETWEEN MONASTERY AND SERFS IN ELEVENTH-CENTURY NORTH-WEST FRANCE

Paul Fouracre

In 1077 one Waleran who held a *villa*\* at Nanteuil in the Dunois in north-western France gave all his *servi*\* and *ancillae*\* from the *villa* to the monastery of Marmoutier, which lay on the north bank of the River Loire, just upstream of the town of Tours (Fig. 12.1). In the charter of donation Waleran made it clear that these serfs were now dependants of the monastery:

Whatever rights I formerly had over them, or over their possessions, let them now belong to St Martin and the monks of Marmoutier. If any of the children of these serfs, male or female, should move to another place, be it near, be it far, and go and live in another *villa*, *vicus*, *castellum* or *civitas*, having been bound by the obligation of servitude, let it be held for them there.<sup>1</sup>

The terms of this grant tell us much. We learn that people could be given away, just as land or livestock or rights could be given away. We are told that the children of the serfs will also belong to Marmoutier, and that this burden they could not escape, even if they moved away from Nanteuil. Their servitude was thus personal and perpetual. Finally, we see four types of places in which such people might dwell. We cannot be sure exactly what is meant by the terms *villa*, *vicus*\*, *castellum*\*, and *civitas*\*, but they probably refer to an estate such as the one at Nanteuil, a village, a fortification and a town, such as that of Tours. The impression we are given is of a landscape in which there was a variety of settlements,

<sup>1</sup> *Liber de Servis Majoris Monasterii*, ed. Ch. L. Grandmaison, Publications de la Société archéologique de Touraine, 16 (Tours, 1864), hereafter *SM*, cited by document number. The documents appended by Grandmaison to the original cartulary are cited as *SMA*. Here: *SMA* 31.

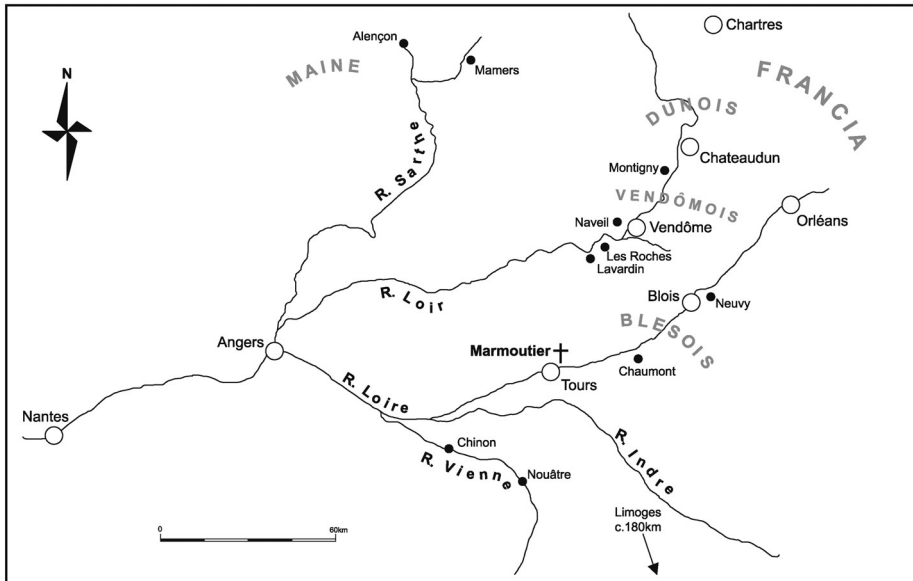


Figure 12.1. Principal places mentioned in charters relating to Marmoutier.

and of a servile population that was liable to move around, but also of a servitude that was immutable. What we also know from Marmoutier's charters is that the monastery had been building up its influence in this area since the beginning of the eleventh century, and that it had faced stiff opposition from some of the local notables there. We know too that serfs such as Waleran's former dependants might bitterly resent being tied forever to the monastery, especially if they did move away and prosper. We are thus dealing with a landscape in which there was a great deal of wrangling over both people and space.

This essay will focus on the relationship between Marmoutier and its serfs as revealed largely through one late eleventh-century **cartulary**\*, 'The Book of the Serfs of Marmoutier' (*Liber de Servis Majoris Monasterii*), and it will discuss the landscape in the terms just outlined. It will seek to explain why Marmoutier's hold over people, rights and land was so often contested, and to understand how the monastery became a supralocal lord. We can then think about what effect the monastery might have had on the formation of local communities. But first it must be admitted that while it is possible to write a coherent history of Marmoutier's expansion in the eleventh century, many features in the local background will remain hidden from us. For we know much more about religion, war and power than we do about settlement and local communities. It is therefore not

surprising that peasant society in north-west France in this period has often been viewed through the prism of lordship. In an important paper published in 1980, R. I. Moore made a bold effort to tackle this 'top down' model in the context of the so-called 'Gregorian reform' of the church.<sup>2</sup> Moore pointed up the community dynamic that fuelled ecclesiastical reform from below. In particular he emphasized the importance of the **parish**\* church as the focus of the newly formed community. Villagers, he argued, wanted decent parish priests unencumbered by family responsibilities, and who might act as mediators between village and lord. It seems, however, that Moore's community, clustered around the church, was largely imagined, or at least that he was taking his cue from numerous French studies that worked backwards from later medieval or modern villages and deduced that they had been formed as a result of the breakup of the great estates which had characterized the Carolingian order.<sup>3</sup> Halsall in his essay shows how such estates emerged in north-eastern France as a ranked society was transformed into communities dominated by a landholding aristocracy. The latter formed an elite that had acquired land and power by working in partnership with the Merovingian rulers at the turn of the sixth and seventh centuries. In the eighth and ninth centuries the pattern of widespread landholding would be consolidated and an archipelago of great estates came to form the basis of Carolingian order. Hence the notion that when that order broke down, one consequence would be a transformation of settlement patterns and estate structures. When Carolingian authority decayed, new spaces were supposedly opened up to be filled by now independent local lords. In this view, lords had encouraged the regrouping of settlements to their own advantage: a nucleated settlement was easier to exploit than the kind of scattered settlements evident in the early Middle Ages. The villagers sought a protector in the parish priest, as a response, Moore thought, to pressures from above. Nice though this argument is, it tells nothing about how villages were actually formed, nor about how they were organized.

<sup>2</sup> R. I. Moore, 'Family, Community and Cult on the Eve of the Gregorian Reform', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, 30 (1980), 49–69.

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, J. Chapelot and R. Fossier, *The Village and House in the Middle Ages* (London, 1980), pp.129–35. The authors admit that it is not possible to see how villages were formed, but that their formation should be deduced from the breakup of the 'large farming units of the early Middle Ages'. G. Fourquin, 'Les temps de croissance', in *Histoire de la France rurale*, vol. 1: *Des origines à 1340*, ed. G. Duby (Paris, 1975), pp.370–547 charts the growth of lordship, castles, population, ploughs, etc., but can find nothing to say about the growth of villages, apart from new settlements on cleared land (p.431), hence the need to deduce their formation.

The assumed contrast between the great estate of the Carolingian period and the nucleated settlement of the central Middle Ages is one that cannot easily be tested. According to Chapelot and Fossier the fragmentation of the great estate can be seen in documents from the eleventh and twelfth centuries in which small units of property are visible, the assumption being that these are subdivisions of once larger units.<sup>4</sup> But as we shall see, one of the chief difficulties in assessing change over the period is the changing nature of the written record. Records are much more numerous, fuller and more detailed from the eleventh century onwards, ushering in what R. E. Barton has recently termed a 'new narrativity'.<sup>5</sup> Are we therefore seeing new things in these records, or old things described for the first time, or at least in unprecedented detail?<sup>6</sup> One reason for suspecting that subdivision is not new is that we can indeed detect it from the seventh century on, whenever the record is full enough. For example, the *villa* of Echternach, which lay midway between the rivers Meuse and Moselle, perfectly fits Halsall's model of a large estate formed in the early Merovingian period to support a service aristocracy. Nevertheless, by the year 706, when a more detailed description of Echternach first appears in a document, the estate had already been divided into several *portiones*.<sup>7</sup> Finally, Moores's account also fails ultimately to escape the 'top down' model: lords still determine changes on the ground.

The idea that central authority broke down at the end of the tenth century, leading to a so-called 'Feudal Revolution', has recently come under strong criticism for drawing too sharp a contrast between supposed Carolingian order and alleged 'feudal' disorder, and for an overly deterministic reading of what little evidence there is.<sup>8</sup> Here is not the place to follow the rather interesting debate

<sup>4</sup> Chapelot and Fossier, *Village and House*, p.135.

<sup>5</sup> R. E. Barton, *Lordship in the County of Maine, c. 890–1160* (Woodbridge, 2004), pp.12–15.

<sup>6</sup> It was with these questions that D. Barthélemy launched his first challenge to the notion of social and political transformation around the year 1000: D. Barthélemy, 'La mutation féodale, a-t-elle eu lieu? (Note critique)', *Annales ESC*, 47 (1992), 767–77.

<sup>7</sup> P. Fouracre, *The Age of Charles Martel* (London, 2000), pp.45–47.

<sup>8</sup> The essence of the criticism and response to it are in D. Barthélemy, S. D. White, T. Reuter and C. Wickham, 'Debate: The Feudal Revolution I–IV', *Past and Present*, 152 (1996), 196–223, and 155 (1997), 177–208. The debate was sparked by T. Bisson, 'The "Feudal Revolution"', *Past and Present*, 142 (1994), 6–42. For an excellent bibliography of the 'mutation issues', see S. D. White, 'Tenth-Century Courts at Mâcon and the Perils of Structuralist History: Re-reading Burgundian Judicial Institutions', in *Conflict in Medieval Europe: Changing Perspectives on Medieval Culture*, ed. W. C. Brown and P. Górecki (Aldershot, 2003), pp.37–68 (pp.37–38, n. 2).

about how, or even whether, society was transformed in this period, but it is important to emphasize the way in which communities have been imagined in the light of a model of transformation which is itself now under fire. The root of the problem where north-western French communities are concerned is that eleventh-century charters from this area (and from most other areas too) tell us very little about space. They have much to say about people, frequently naming serfs, for instance, but they give little indication of where these people actually lived.<sup>9</sup> Charters from England, by contrast, have much to say about space in the form of boundary clauses, but very little about the people who lived within those boundaries. This means that, for different reasons, on both sides of the Channel it is hard to match people to space, but in England, as both Basset and Reynolds and Langlands demonstrate elsewhere in this volume, it is easier to describe how boundaries changed as new units were carved out of older and larger ones. Incidentally, it is worth pointing out that much of the unflattering contrast English historians routinely make between England and the Continent in the late Saxon period comes from the difference in the nature of the charters. Where we have people we have noise, dispute, and conflict — a nearly dysfunctional society in English eyes.<sup>10</sup> In England, where we have boundaries we may hear of disputes between the powerful, but the community is silent, and the landscape looks very orderly.

### *Marmoutier's Rise in the Eleventh Century*

The monastery of Marmoutier was founded in c.371 by St Martin as a retreat from nearby Tours where he was bishop. Marmoutier acquired enormous prestige from its founder, who became one of Francia's premier saints. Although the institution seems to have waned in importance and influence after the Merovingian period, the association with St Martin would remain a key asset throughout

<sup>9</sup> Continental charters for earlier periods also generally give little information about boundaries, but there are significant exceptions to this rule, such as charters from ninth-century Brittany: see W. Davies, *Small Worlds: The Village Community in Early Medieval Brittany* (London, 1988).

<sup>10</sup> In the words of the late Patrick Wormald, 'There is [...] reason to believe that the English scene was quite unlike that in Professor White's Touraine: until, that is, conquest superimposed the French scene upon it'. P. Wormald, 'Giving God and King their Due: Conflict and its Regulation in the Early English State', in P. Wormald, *Legal Culture in the Early Medieval West* (London, 1999), pp.333–57, at p.341. Stephen White is a leading scholar on conflict in eleventh-century Touraine.

the Middle Ages. At the end of the tenth century Marmoutier was effectively refounded as a Cluniac house. The two earliest accounts of the monastery's re-foundation position themselves in a world of decline and destruction, in this case making the Vikings the cause of Marmoutier's decline in the tenth century.<sup>11</sup> Though composed in the later eleventh and early twelfth centuries respectively, these narratives are firmly in the Cluniac tradition of writing about reform and renewal. It is important to recognize the strength of this tradition because it directly affects views of the landscape: destruction and emptiness are emphasized in order to explain the need for renewal and to point up the achievement of reform. Sometimes this rhetoric has been taken too literally, as in Southern's masterpiece *The Making of the Middle Ages*, which opens with an Angevin landscape still to recover from Viking destruction, a land that had been so severely depopulated and so long left fallow that the very fertility of its soil had been restored.<sup>12</sup> It is a view that has contributed much to the sense that the late tenth and early eleventh centuries ushered in a new age. One wonders whether the rhetoric of depopulation in the northern *meseta* and sub-*meseta*, with which Julio Escalona and Iñaki Martín Viso contend in this volume, is part of this same tradition.<sup>13</sup> Familiar phrases of emptiness and renewal are certainly found in Catalan charters further to the east in the later tenth century.<sup>14</sup> They are also to be found in English narratives of the so-called 'tenth-century reformation'.<sup>15</sup> In all of these areas one could argue that reform was actually triggered by a growth in population and prosperity rather than as a response to decline and destruction. On the other hand, this religiously inspired rhetoric of reform is important evidence for a contemporary sense of change and novelty across Europe.

<sup>11</sup> S. Farmer, *Communities of St Martin: Legend and Ritual in Medieval Tours* (Ithaca and London, 1991), pp.78–116.

<sup>12</sup> R. W. Southern, *The Making of the Middle Ages* (London, 1967), p.17.

<sup>13</sup> In addition to their contributions here, see also J. Escalona Monge, 'Comunidades, territorios y poder condal en la Castilla del Duero in el siglo X', *Studia Historica: Historia Medieval*, 18–19 (2000–01), 85–120, and S. Castellanos and I. Martín Viso, 'The Local Articulation of Central Power in the North of the Iberian Peninsula (500–1000)', *Early Medieval Europe*, 13 (2005), 1–42 (pp.30–31).

<sup>14</sup> J. Jarrett, 'Power Over Past and Future: Abbess Emma and the Nunnery of Sant Joan de les Abadesses', *Early Medieval Europe*, 12 (2003), 229–56.

<sup>15</sup> For caution against taking this rhetoric too literally in the English context, see C. Cubitt, 'The Tenth-Century Benedictine Reform', *Early Medieval Europe*, 6 (1997), 77–94.



The two narratives of Marmoutier's reform privilege the comital houses of Anjou and Blois respectively, the earlier highlighting the importance of Angevin help, the later, the aid from Blois.<sup>16</sup> Marmoutier lay on the River Loire roughly midway between Anjou and Blois (Fig. 12.1) and was in effect able to play the two houses off against each other. Conversely, the monastery's opponents were able to appeal to Anjou and Blois for help against Marmoutier. In addition to the counts, there were also viscounts who feature as both supporters and opponents in our documents, as well as local *milites*\*, and, of course, bishops. Marmoutier was not the only monastery trying to establish itself along the Loire and its tributaries. There was also St Aubin at Angers, another late tenth-century refoundation, and La Trinité at Vendôme, consecrated in 1040. To the north lay St Vincent of Le Mans, and to the south, near the fortification of Nouâtre where Marmoutier controlled several serf families, lay the monastery of St Mary of Noyers, founded c. 1031. None of these foundations was as big or powerful as Marmoutier, but they share the same profile in terms of receiving gifts and expanding their lands and resources. Foundation, or refoundation, was followed by a rush of donations that reached a plateau around the middle of the eleventh century and began to decline in the later part of the century. By the middle of the twelfth century, these monasteries were receiving relatively few donations.<sup>17</sup> By the mid-eleventh century, the Loire valley and its tributaries was seemingly congested with competing institutions and families. This was what R. I. Moore has termed a time of 'hectic generosity' as local families, mostly of lesser noble status such as the *milites*, tried to consolidate their standing by giving to monasteries and receiving from them spiritual privileges.<sup>18</sup> Equally hectic was what Moore calls the 'counter-attack' by nobles 'competing desperately amongst themselves for land'. This, explains Moore, is why at a time when ecclesiastical institutions were the benefactors of donations on an unprecedented scale, they were also locked in interminable disputes about resources, and often faced violence from the very families they counted amongst their clients and donors. An example would be Marmoutier's struggle to keep control of a church at Naveil, just outside of Vendôme. Sometime between 1009 and 1027 Marmoutier bought the rights of this church with the permission of its bishop, the renowned Fulbert of Chartres. This meant

<sup>16</sup> Farmer, *Communities of St Martin*, pp.78–116.

<sup>17</sup> S. D. White, *Custom, Kinship, and Gifts to Saints: The 'Laudatio Parentum' in Western France 1050–1150* (Chapel Hill, 1988), pp.20–25. The Appendix, pp.212–34, has excellent tables breaking down the business of each monastery by twenty-five-year period.

<sup>18</sup> R. I. Moore, *The First European Revolution c. 970–1215* (Oxford, 2000), p.82.

buying out the bishop's tenant and his sub-tenant, and the latter's sons, and their mother. The initial arrangement was then challenged no less than eleven times up to the year 1072.<sup>19</sup> Other parties claiming an interest were bought out, and as time passed more and more of the descendants of the original tenants demanded money as compensation for what they regarded as a loss of inheritance. Marmoutier seems time and again to have been prepared to pay rather than fight. By 1072 it had paid out over 340 *solidi*\* and seven pounds of silver, in addition to the original 'not small' purchase price. For one group to give and for another to contest the gift is certainly not new, but some novelty lies in the scale and intensity of the giving and the taking, and also in the detail in which this traffic was recorded. Making and keeping detailed records was a way of managing change. Marmoutier itself produced three cartularies in the later eleventh and early twelfth centuries. These are cartularies for the Dunois and the Vendômois and the 'Book of Serfs'.<sup>20</sup> In addition historians have reconstructed cartularies for the Blesois, La Perche and for the Tours area itself.

### *Monastic Familia and Serf Families*

The 'Book of Serfs' consists of 127 notices all concerned with serfs, although the other cartularies also contain material dealing with serfs.<sup>21</sup> It was put together around the year 1070, but the bulk of the notices come from the time of Abbots Albert and Bartholomew, thus 1032–64, the time when giving to the monastery was at its height. The impetus behind collecting these notices may have been a kind of stock-taking after the death of Bartholomew and, probably, after the death of a prior called Odo who was Marmoutier's chief agent in the Vendômois.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> The business of the church at Naveil is the subject of the first twelve documents of the monastery's cartulary for the Vendômois: *Cartulaire de Marmoutier pour le Vendômois*, ed. M. de Trémault (Paris, 1893).

<sup>20</sup> *Cartulaire de Marmoutier pour le Dunois*, ed. M. Emille Mabilley (Chateaudun, 1874); Cartulary for the Vendômois, above note 19; the 'Book of Serfs', above note 1. On the composition of the various cartularies, see D. Barthélemy, 'Note sur les cartulaires de Marmoutier (Touraine) au XI<sup>e</sup> siècle', in *Les Cartulaires*, ed. O. Guyotjeannin, L. Morelle and L. Parisse (Paris, 1992), pp.247–59.

<sup>21</sup> These are the documents Grandmaison appended to his edition of the 'Book of Serfs'.

<sup>22</sup> The penultimate notice about the church at Naveil from 1072 refers to Odo's death three years earlier, and notes his importance in settling previous disputes: *Cartulaire de Marmoutier pour le Vendômois*, ed. de Trémault, no. 11.

What the notices do in effect is to record the servile status of individuals who had either recently become serfs of the monastery or who had contested their status. The monastery went to great lengths to get recalcitrant serfs to acknowledge their status because this determined the status of all their descendants, and so the 'Book of Serfs' worked to safeguard future resources that could be expected to grow. What the serfs actually did in terms of service, or owed as tribute, was not recorded.

Many of the notices recorded 'auto-deditions', this being when people voluntarily gave themselves to the monastery to become its serfs.<sup>23</sup> They publicly acknowledged their newly chosen status by placing four *denarii*\* (pennies) on their heads, and it was declared that they and all their descendants would remain serfs of Marmoutier, forever. Grandmaison, the editor of the 'Book of Serfs', believed that the situation in the countryside of the Touraine must have been truly terrible for free people to enter into servitude in this way. Here he was mindful of a well-known early medieval **formula**\* from Tours in which desperate people commended themselves to a lord (becoming his serfs) in return for guarantees of basic sustenance and shelter.<sup>24</sup> Dominique Barthélemy, however, has read the notices in a much more positive light.<sup>25</sup> He argued that those giving themselves into servitude were hardly desperate peasants, and most of them were not peasants at all. Becoming a serf of the monastery might actually be a good career move, thought Barthélemy, when the newly enserfed received lands on favourable terms, or filled important posts within the monastic *familia*\*, such as bailiff or cellarer. In addition, such people would receive spiritual privileges in return for giving themselves. Barthélemy termed them 'ministerial serfs', by which he meant to indicate that servitude was not a bar to social and economic improvement, and the difference between freedom and servitude could be illusory. Put this way, one can see the attractions of being part of Marmoutier's *familia*. As we shall see, membership of this community, which conferred the (unspecified) benefits of its *societas* on its more privileged members, was sufficiently valuable to be offered as inducement to people to settle their disputes with the monastery. Such privileged people might include serfs as well as the nobility. In this sense the *familia* can be

<sup>23</sup> Examples of auto-deditions: *SM* 3, 17–20, 25–27, 29, 30, 45, 46.

<sup>24</sup> *Liber de Servis*, ed. Grandmaison, pp.xii–xvii. The Tours 'commendation formula' is *Formulae Turonenses*, no. 47, in *Formulae Merovingici et Karolini Aevi*, ed. K. Zeumer, MGH Leges in quarto, Sectio 5 (Hanover, 1886), p.158.

<sup>25</sup> D. Barthélemy, *La mutation de l'an mil, a-t-elle eu lieu? Servage et chevalerie dans la France des X<sup>e</sup> et XI<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris, 1997), pp.57–91. This is the most extensive modern study of the Marmoutier material.

seen as a voluntary community that grew whenever and wherever people joined it. We might see here a realization of that claim to infinite space which, elsewhere in this volume, Sennis explains was part of the monastic imagination. In practice, however, Marmoutier's community also had an involuntary aspect because many serfs were included in it against their will. This element can be seen to include some of the descendants of those who had given themselves into serfdom, for, as we have already noted, the gift of self (auto-dedication) always included future progeny. The concept of a community that could flow into any person or any space here comes up against the very practical difficulties of subordinating needs of the serf family to the interests of its own *familia*.

It is indeed true that many of the Marmoutier serfs look relatively prosperous, and they certainly were of sufficient importance for their voices to be recorded in our notices. But they remained serfs, which means that they faced restrictions on their movement, on marriage, and on inheritance. It was clear that these restrictions would apply to all their descendants, and it is reasonable to think that the more prosperous families became, the more they would resent restrictions on marriage and inheritance. Although families might gain immediate advantages by becoming serfs, subsequent generations of the family might equally wish to cast off their servile status. In 1069 we hear of one *Conversa* who had been married to a certain *Otbert*. *Otbert* had become a serf when he took up the tenancy of Marmoutier land and became one of the monastery's 'mayors'. This meant that his wife was now a serf, as were all the children born to them. After *Otbert*'s death, and after the death of all the children except one son and one daughter, *Conversa* petitioned the abbot to free her daughter so that she could marry a free man. Abbot Bartholomew agreed, but only on condition that the family leave the land, that the son and his descendants remain serfs, and that should the girl fail to find a free husband, she would have to return to servitude.<sup>26</sup> Very few of these notices record manumissions, and where they do occur, it is other people who free the serfs.<sup>27</sup> With the exception of *Conversa*'s daughter, Marmoutier itself frees no one.

There were many ways into serfdom, but no way out without permission of the owner.<sup>28</sup> According to the evidence of the 'Book of Serfs', Marmoutier acquired its serfs in four main ways: by gift, through auto-dedication, by marriage (when a Marmoutier serf married, the spouse also became a Marmoutier serf) and by punishment, or in lieu of debts. It was the last two means, marriage and punish-

<sup>26</sup> *SM* 76.

<sup>27</sup> Examples: *SM* 13, 51, 52.

<sup>28</sup> For an example of a serf buying freedom from an owner, see *SMA* 18.

ment, which most often led to disputes in which people refused to accept their servile status. As we have already noted, the monastery was prepared to go to great lengths to win these disputes because what was at stake was future generations of serfs, and for the same reason the serfs sometimes fought on for generations. For example, some time before 1067 one Otbert, a shepherd and a free man married an *ancilla* of Marmoutier.<sup>29</sup> He now became the monastery's serf, or, according to another notice, he was made a serf because he had burned down one of the monastery's barns. When the *ancilla* died, Otbert married a free woman called Plectrude, and he began to assert that he was also free. Prior Odo got him to admit his servile status, and this meant that Plectrude was now a serf too. 'Not wishing to leave her man', she made a public acknowledgment of her status. The couple had a son, Vitalis. After Otbert was dead, Plectrude claimed that Vitalis was free because he had been born before Otbert had acknowledged his servile status. She agreed to go to the ordeal of hot iron to prove Vitalis's right, but when the iron was heated she lost her nerve, and the case. But Vitalis fought on for the next generation, only finally yielding in 1096, when Pope Urban II came to bless Marmoutier's new basilica.<sup>30</sup>

Marriage between free and unfree people was naturally a source of friction as the monastery sought to own the children of such marriages. Marriages between serfs of different lords were likewise problematic since both lords might claim the children of these unions and could, as we shall see, insist that children be divided between the different lords. Cross-lordship marriages also made serf inheritance complex. A particularly good example of the frictions over inheritance is provided by a notice of a dispute that ended around 1084.<sup>31</sup> It concerned three serfs, Hilduin, Guy and Herbert, who were serfs of the count of Anjou but whose maternal grandparents had been serfs of Marmoutier. They had cousins on the Marmoutier side. On the death of the grandparents, all the cousins wished to divide up their inheritance, which included houses and vineyards, so that we must imagine that these people were relatively well off. Marmoutier judged that Hilduin, Guy and Herbert had no right to a share in this property. The serfs then turned to their lord, Fulk, count of Anjou, 'believing that they could get, through

<sup>29</sup> *SM* 108.

<sup>30</sup> *SM* 127. Plectrude's refusal of the ordeal is discussed by S. D. White, 'Proposing the Ordeal and Avoiding It: Strategy and Power in Western French Litigation, 1050–1110', in *Cultures of Power: Lordship, Status and Process in Twelfth-Century Europe*, ed. T. Bisson (Philadelphia, 1995), pp. 89–123.

<sup>31</sup> *SM* 116.

the *violentia* of their lord the count, what they had not been able to get in the *placitum*\* (the hearing held by Marmoutier)'. Fulk heard their case but judged against their claim. They then turned to other means, and continued to lobby the count until there was another hearing before Abbot Bernard. Again their claim was turned down, and the serfs continued to harass the monastery until Marmoutier finally settled by paying Hilduin, Guy and Herbert fifteen pounds of silver to quit the claim and state that none of their relatives and future descendants would ever raise it again. The count gave guarantees that if they did return to the claim he would expel them from his strongholds and fortifications. And this is one of the examples in which contumacious serfs were also given spiritual benefits ('our benefits and society') as an incentive to settle. The dispute had probably lasted about twenty years.<sup>32</sup> The persistence of both sides in this case is striking, as is the fact that despite their obvious wealth and influence this family group was unable to share an inheritance across lordships. It was said to be the 'law' (*lex*) that did not allow them to do so, and this was a principle so strong that the count could not overturn it. In a context in which there was fierce competition for resources, it is not surprising that a law that prevented wealth from being transferred from one lordship to another should be vigorously maintained.

A second case shows the lengths to which serfs might go to try and prevent their wealth being divided between different lords, and it further highlights their vulnerability in matters of inheritance.<sup>33</sup> Sometime before 1037 Hilducia, an *ancilla* of the viscount of Blois, had married a Marmoutier serf, Ohelm. Ohelm himself had been given to the monastery by the count and countess of Blois, but seems to have resented his new position for he was described as 'always rebellious and treacherous'. Fearful that Hilducia's former owners might cause trouble, Ohelm put up the money to buy her freedom, and a charter of manumission was drawn up, witnessed by the viscount and his wife. Hilducia was thus temporarily free, but once she married Ohelm she became a serf of Marmoutier. The couple then had a son, Ascelin, who seems to have prospered. In a charter of c. 1040 the monks had got Ascelin to swear obedience to them, to stop him turning out like his father.<sup>34</sup> They were particularly concerned that he would marry a free woman and then make trouble by getting powerful people to support him. Ascelin did in fact associate with the families of local *milites*, witnessing several charters from the

<sup>32</sup> It seems likely that it began after the death of Abbot Bartholomew in 1064 and it was concluded in 1084.

<sup>33</sup> *SMA* 18, 27.

<sup>34</sup> *SMA* 7.

Dunois, including a royal *praeceptum*\*.<sup>35</sup> After the deaths of Ohelm, Hilducia and Ascelin, the descendants of Hilducia's original owners began to fight the monastery for Ascelin's property. No heir is mentioned. The case turned on the status of Hilducia at the moment of her marriage to Ohelm. If she had not been free, then they could claim Ascelin as their serf and have rights to his property. The monks brought out the charter of manumission, but their opponents refused to look at it. They then turned to violence, harassing the monks until Marmoutier bought them out. In the next generation the dispute was reopened, and again violence was employed to force the monks to settle. Once more the monks bought out their opponents, and conferred spiritual benefits upon them to seal the settlement. Marmoutier clearly had the cash to secure its future resources in this way, but its ability and willingness to pay might help explain why so many people challenged it.

So far we have seen cases in which the serf voice is strong because the serfs had the wherewithal to fight. People of lesser standing and influence seem to have been treated more precipitately and may as a result have suffered even more disruption in the formation of families and communities. One Gandelbert, for example, denied that he was serf. Prior Odo took him from Vendôme to Marmoutier where he was simply imprisoned 'for a long time' until he acknowledged his status.<sup>36</sup> In 1087 Marmoutier and a Walter Rimand found that they had *servi* and *ancillae* in common, presumably as a result of intermarriage. They proceeded to divide up the children of these serfs, splitting up siblings.<sup>37</sup> Finally one little girl was left, not worth assigning because she was still in the cradle and might die anyway. So the decision on her was postponed. What it actually meant for siblings to be assigned to different lords in this way is not revealed. But we should imagine that even if family units were allowed to stay together, the division would affect future marriage choices and prevent a common inheritance in the next generation.

This case, and many others from the 'Book of Serfs', gives one the impression that Marmoutier and other lords might have control over individual families in one locality or community in which several lords might have dependants. That would certainly seem to follow from the gifts of individuals to the monastery, for presumably some at least of these people continued to live amongst fellows who had not been given away. Crucial here was the principle of personal dependency,

<sup>35</sup> *Cartulaire de Marmoutier pour le Dunois*, ed. Mabille, 17, 22 (the *praeceptum*), 48, 49, 132.

<sup>36</sup> *SM* 106.

<sup>37</sup> *SMA* 36. That siblings were split up is indicated by the naming of a single child from a group of more than one, e.g. *de infantibus Rotberti Chiphardi, Adelitia* who went to Marmoutier, meaning, presumably, that the other *infantes* would have gone to Walter Rimand.

so that if people did move, they carried 'the obligation of servitude' with them, as we saw in Waleran's grant with which this essay opened. Marmoutier had serfs over a very large area: locations in the 'Book of Serfs' stretch from the Limousin to the borders of Normandy. The key to maintaining control over people across this great space was to identify them as serfs, to make sure that they acknowledged their servitude, and to make sure that their children were not lost to the monastery's *familia*. For instance, some time between 1032 and 1064 Marmoutier was given two *coliberti*\*. The monks then identified the two bastard sons of the *coliberti* and went on to identify the children of these sons who lived near the fortification of Nouâtre.<sup>38</sup> Listing and naming was all important here, and especial care seems to have been taken to identify people who lived at greater distance from the monastery. When the monastery was given two *servuli* over 150 km away to the south, near Limoges, the monks recorded the names of the *servuli*, the names of all four of their parents, their place of birth, the name of the local castle, and the name of its castellan. This was so that the descendants of the *servuli* could in turn be identified 'that not just they, but all those born to them in the future should serve the abbot and brothers of Marmoutier as serfs, for all the days of their life'.<sup>39</sup>

Because it had interests in so many different places, Marmoutier could be described as a 'supralocal' lord. It did not, however, have a *districtum*, an area in which it exercised rights over all the inhabitants. Nor are there references to it having its own forces or fortifications. It was not in this sense a 'banal lord\*'. The picture we get of lordship from the 'Book of Serfs' and the other Marmoutier cartularies is one in which a pack of local notables seems to have worried at every resource. What we see is a massive space over which the Marmoutier community was spread, but spread very thinly. This space included a great variety of interest groups and families across the social spectrum, ranging from serfs, through *milites*, to comital and episcopal elites. This plurality of groups exercised a range of powers, derived from a mixture of 'official' authority, spiritual authority, wealth and force. The variety is reflected in the complex ways in which disputes were settled, drawing on law, custom, norms, and brute force, and also in the way in which disputes could be extremely protracted. The cases we have discussed here were held in different venues: in the chapter house of Marmoutier itself, in the

<sup>38</sup> SM 48. How *coliberti* differed from *servi* is not clear from this material. *Coliberti* could be given away, and they laboured under the same perpetual servitude as the *servi*. See Barthélemy, *La mutation*, p.123.

<sup>39</sup> SM 75.



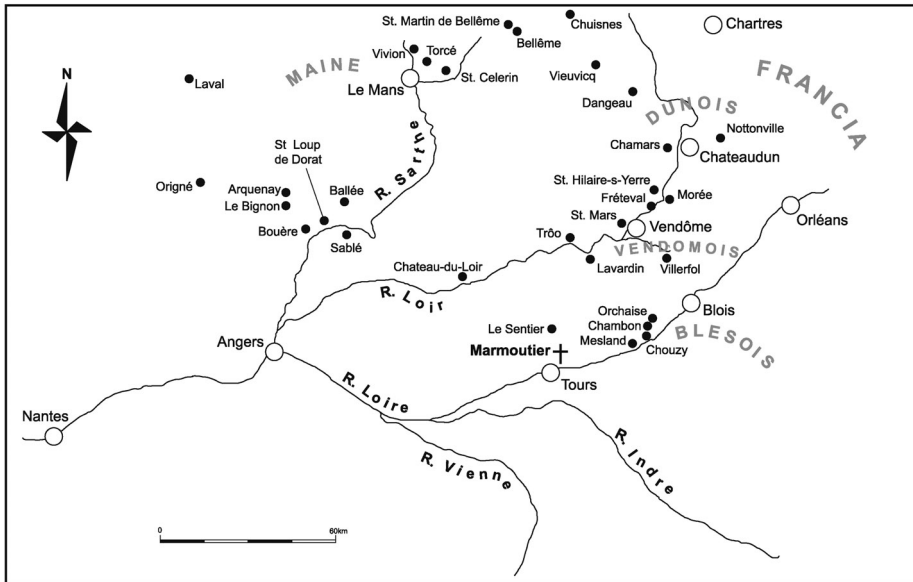


Figure 12.2. Priors of Marmoutier established in the eleventh century (after Gantier, 'Recherches sur les possessions et prieurés de l'Abbaye de Marmoutier').

count's court, before the prior, and in the Ohelm case, in the meadow between the hall and the tower at Blois. We may see here a topography that matches the plurality of interest groups.

Marmoutier managed its interests through a network of local cells and agents that developed into a system of priories (Fig. 12.2).<sup>40</sup> Priors came into being when the monastery had acquired a concentration of land and rights in a given locality.<sup>41</sup> They consisted of a handful of monks and their prior, and served both as spiritual centres and as points from which resources were collected and controlled. The priories were in theory under the strict control of the abbot, and were the means by which the monastic *familia* could spread itself over such a massive space. Chamars and Lavardin, two places prominent in the 'Book of Serfs' seem

<sup>40</sup> O. Gantier, 'Recherches sur les possessions et les prieurés de l'Abbaye de Marmoutier du x<sup>e</sup> au xiii<sup>e</sup> siècle', *Revue Mabillon*, 53 (1963), 93–110 (maps after p.136).

<sup>41</sup> The term *prioratus* first appears at the end of the eleventh century. Before this there was a variety of terms (*cella*, *obedientia*, *locus*, *domus*), or reference was simply made to the monks of St Martin in a location other than Marmoutier itself; Gantier, 'Recherches sur les possessions et les prieurés de l'Abbaye de Marmoutier', pp.96–99.

to have been the first areas in which the monastery's resources were organized in this way. By the middle of the thirteenth century a great chain of Marmoutier priories stretched from southern Aquitaine to England.

It was the prior who dealt with the serfs in a given area. We have seen from the cases discussed here the importance of Prior Odo in enforcing serfdom in the Vendôme area. He held initial hearings on questions of status, he carried out the monastery's decisions, and he inflicted punishment, including imprisonment. It was the prior who monitored serf marriages, identified children, and reported on disputed inheritances. Major disputes were held before the abbot, with the local prior as a key witness. When serfs publicly acknowledged their status, either at moments of auto-dedication or when they were forced to do so, this took place in Marmoutier itself before an audience of the whole community. No doubt the imposing architecture of the abbey and the size and illustriousness of the community played a part in making such occasions solemn and binding. But the key link between the serf and the monastery remained the prior. Relations between the priories and the monastic centre would therefore directly affect the impact that Marmoutier had on the lives of its serfs. They would, in turn, determine the nature of the *familia* in the local context.

### *Conclusion: A New World?*

Barthélemy's insistence that there was little new in relations between lords and serfs in the eleventh century forms part of a wider 'anti-mutationist' argument. In his view, remember, historians have mistaken the changing nature of charters, with their greater detail, for change itself. One can answer this point by arguing that the production of more, and more detailed, records is itself likely to have been a response to change. In the case of Marmoutier, the production of large numbers of documents both charted the massive inflow of gifts to the monastery and dealt with the complaints, claims and quarrels that followed in the wake of this generosity. According to evidence such as the tortuous history of the monastery's attempts to control the church at Naveil, competition for resources was intense. If this picture holds good for relations between lay lords in general, then the eleventh-century Touraine must have been seething with disputes, many of which no doubt involved violence.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>42</sup> For an excellent discussion of the place of violence in disputes in this area, see S. D. White, 'Feuding and Peace-Making in the Touraine around the Year 1100', *Traditio*, 42 (1986), 195–263.

It is of course impossible to be categorical about how much was new in the eleventh century precisely because the changing nature of the record limits comparison with earlier periods. A further problem where servitude is concerned is the persistence of conservative terminology: *servus*, for example, is the term for slave in classical Latin as well as for the kinds of serfs we have been meeting, and they were certainly not slaves.<sup>43</sup> Accounts of how one gets from the slave of antiquity to the serf of the central Middle Ages tend to conform to the positions historians hold on the wider issue of post-Carolingian transformation (or 'mutation'). But the history of servitude is much more complex than the stark binary oppositions that characterize the transformation debate will allow. Firstly, it is not possible to speak of slaves or serfs in general without being aware of considerable regional variation, and secondly we must note that there was differentiation within the servile class at all periods. It is this variation that made it possible, for example, for Barthélemy to argue that 'ministerial serfs' are visible in the Carolingian period. He is right. Indeed, we can trace them back before this, to, say, the early seventh-century 'Will' of Bishop Bertramn of Le Mans where they are actually called *ministeriales*.<sup>44</sup> But the argument must turn not on whether such people existed, but on whether they were more common in the eleventh century than at earlier times. One reason for thinking that the latter might be the case is an association between differentiation and increasing economic activity.

In the 'Book of Serfs' we find three basic (and ancient) principles governing relations with serfs: there is only serf and free, nothing in between; servility was personal (that is, the person carried the burden with them); serfs could not inherit outside the lordship. These conservative principles were put into practice in a landscape in which there was an increasing amount of cash. There was also some population movement into new settlements and around new fortifications. At the same time, as we have seen, Marmoutier massively expanded its holdings of land and people, just as other monasteries were doing so. The serfs we see in our cartulary are nearly all likely to have been acquired by Marmoutier in the two generations leading up to the 'Book's' composition, at a time when there were unprecedented opportunities for serfs to move and to prosper. This is the background to

<sup>43</sup> For a discussion of the terminological problems, see H.-W. Goetz, 'Serfdom and the Beginnings of a "Seigneurial System" in the Carolingian Period: A Review of the Evidence', *Early Medieval Europe*, 2 (1993), 29–51.

<sup>44</sup> *Testamentum Bertramni Cenomannis*, in *Diplomata, Chartae, Epistolae, Leges aliaque instrumenta ad Res Gallo-Francicas spectantia*, ed. J. M. Pardessus, 2 vols (Paris, 1843–49), I, 197–215 (p.208).

the very high levels of contestation we see in all the Marmoutier cartularies. There does seem to be novelty here, in degree if not in kind. By acquiring serfs in many different localities, by discouraging marriage across lordships and preventing cross-lordship inheritance, and by insisting on personal dependance, Marmoutier is likely to have frustrated the consolidation of serf families. As we have seen, Marmoutier privileged its own *familia* at the expense of the serf family.

We began by noting how difficult, or even impossible, it is to chart the evolution of the village in north-west France. It supposedly developed as a result of the breakup of the large farming units of the early Middle Ages. But as already noted, these large estates had always been subject to division between heirs. Even the massive ecclesiastical estates of the early Middle Ages, which were in principle indivisible, were in practice let out in farming units to clients, sometimes in their thousands.<sup>45</sup> This is of course part of the process known to historians as 'manorialization', which has been traced back to the seventh century. Most of the farming units named in the Carolingian **polyptychs**\* of the ninth and tenth centuries would appear later as villages, and many later medieval villages have names that were already centuries old. In other words, most places that would become villages had had people in them for a very long time. What distinguishes the village from the earlier settlement is the evident level of communal organization.<sup>46</sup> This may yet again be an impression distorted by the increasing amount of information about local organization that becomes available to us from the twelfth century onwards. On the other hand, our evidence from Marmoutier suggests that the monastery's dealings with its serfs would be inimical to the formation of villages because the monastery sought to control individuals or families in communities or settlements in which several lords were likely to have interests. No village community was likely to form where the monastery insisted on the priority of its own *familia* over the interests of individuals and families, and this goes for other lords too. The striking image of Marmoutier and Walter Rimand splitting up families in their own respective interests suggests a very high level of intervention in the serf community. Conditions in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries look more propitious for the growth of villages. Firstly, serf movement into the *familia*

<sup>45</sup> The monastery of St Wandrille on the lower Seine, for instance, was recorded for the year 787 as possessing 3964 *mansis*\*, 2395 of which were let out to clients: I. Wood, 'Teutsind, Witlaic and the History of Merovingian *Precaria*', in *Property and Power in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. W. Davies and P. Fouracre (Cambridge, 1995), pp.31–52.

<sup>46</sup> This is the central theme of L. Genicot's survey, *Rural Communities in the Medieval West* (Baltimore, 1990).

tails off.<sup>47</sup> Secondly, as priories became more numerous and more widespread, links between the monastery and the priory became weaker, and Marmoutier's centralized control slackened.<sup>48</sup> The growing stability of the serf population and localization of the *familia* to the priory, as well as falling levels of violence between competing lords, must all have contributed to a more favourable environment. This is of course only one aspect of village formation, and there are a host of other factors — economic, demographic, agronomic, climatic, administrative, etc. — to be taken into consideration. The evidence from Marmoutier is, however, important in showing us how status determined relations people had both with the local community and with the monastic community. It was only when the latter intervened less in the former that villages could be organized in the form that we find them from the central Middle Ages onwards.

<sup>47</sup> The last charter of auto-dedication is from 1113/14, and the last gift of a serf is from 1223.

<sup>48</sup> Farmer, *Communities of St Martin*, pp.128–34.



## NARRATING PLACES: MEMORY AND SPACE IN MEDIEVAL MONASTERIES

Antonio Sennis

### *A Foundation*

Around the year 742, after spending three years in Westphalia as a missionary, Sturm — a Bavarian who, as a child, had entered the monastery of Fritzlar and had been educated by the illustrious Abbot Wigbert — was summoned by Archbishop Boniface. Boniface instructed him to go around the forests that surrounded the course of the river Fulda and look for a deserted location in which to found a monastery. With the two companions the archbishop had given him, Sturm left and began to search for a site suitable for a monastic community. Once they had arrived at a place called Herfeld, the three monks established a dwelling and started to live there in meditation and contemplation. After some time, Sturm went back to Boniface and described ‘in detail the location, the quality of the soil, the running water, the springs and valleys and everything else connected with that place’. The archbishop replied to him that, although he appreciated the fact that they had found a place where to live, he was afraid to allow them to continue to stay there, because that location was too close to where the as yet unchristianized Saxons were settled. He therefore suggested that his disciple look somewhere else, for a place where an ascetic life could be conducted without danger. Sturm resumed his quest (*exploratio* in the words of his biographer) along the course of the Fulda, inspecting ‘the land, the mountains, the hills, the heights and the valleys’.

More time passed and, wanting to know if any progress had been made, the archbishop sent for Sturm once again. Receiving him in a secluded area of his palace, he reassured him that the predestined site of his new abbey had not yet been revealed, but that it soon would be. In fact when Sturm eventually found the

right place, he understood this as divine inspiration and, delighted and filled with joy, blessed it and carefully marked it. That was the site on which the monastery of Fulda would be erected (Fig. 13.1).<sup>1</sup>

The location of a newly established monastery was a very important matter, even if the choice of site was determined by factors upon which the narratives of foundation often touch only implicitly.<sup>2</sup> In early medieval Italy monastic properties were, for example, generally defined as areas having the main site as their centre (*terra circa monasterium posita*), and in many ninth-century **cartularies**\* documents were organized according to administrative districts, as is the case of those produced at Fulda, Mondsee and Wissembourg.<sup>3</sup> A community's inclination to control and organize the surrounding landscape — which was reflected in the frequent reference to a monastery as the place (*locus*) par excellence — was, as well as having some direct administrative purposes, also justified by the fact that, in the monastic mentality, secular space had a meaning only insofar as it was purged by the presence of a monastery. In addition, a monastery was a sacred place, the point of intersection between the material and the spiritual worlds and, as such, a place of power.<sup>4</sup> It is therefore no surprise that, for example, the

<sup>1</sup> P. Engelbert, *Die Vita Sturmi des Eigil von Fulda: Literarkritisch-historische Untersuchung und Edition* (Marburg, 1968), pp. 132–43 for these events; pp. 135 and 136 for the two quoted passages; p. 138 for Sturm as *explorator*, and his quest *exploratio*. On this episode, see also C. Wickham, 'European Forests in the Early Middle Ages: Landscape and Land Clearance', in Wickham, *Land and Power: Studies in Italian and European Social History, 400–1200* (London, 1994), pp. 155–99 (pp. 156–59).

<sup>2</sup> A. Remensnyder, *Remembering Kings Past: Monastic Foundation Legends in Medieval Southern France* (Ithaca and London, 1995), p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> Ideologically asserted centrality of a monastery with reference to the surrounding landscape: L. Lagazzi, *Segni sulla terra: Determinazione dei confini e percezione dello spazio nell'alto medioevo* (Bologna, 1991), pp. 87–88; A. Remensnyder, 'Togographies of Memory: Center and Periphery in High Medieval France', in *Concepts of the Past: Ritual, Memory, Historiography*, ed. G. Althoff, J. Fried and P. J. Geary (Washington and Cambridge, 2002), pp. 193–214. Examples of cartularies organized according to administrative districts: *Urkundenbuch des Klosters Fulda*, ed. E. E. Stengel (Marburg, 1956) and *Codex Diplomaticus Fuldensis*, ed. E. F. J. Dronke (Cassel, 1850); *Das älteste Traditionsbuch des Klosters Mondsee*, ed. G. Rath and E. Reiter, *Forschungen zur Geschichte Oberösterreichs*, 16 (Linz, 1989); *Traditiones Wizenburgenses: Die Urkunden des Klosters Weissenburg, 661–864*, ed. K. Glöckner and A. Doll (Darmstadt, 1979).

<sup>4</sup> Monastery as *locus* by antonomasia: A. Dimier, 'Le mot *locus* dans le sens de monastère', *Revue Mabillon*, 62 (1972), 133–54. Foundation of a monastery as an act of cleansing the impure landscape: G. Penco, 'Un elemento della mentalità monastica medievale: la concezione dello spazio', *Benedictina*, 35 (1988), 35–71 (p. 56); Remensnyder, *Remembering Kings Past*, p. 48.





Figure 13.1. Main places mentioned in text.

Monasteries as sacred places, by definition, in the territory: G. M. Cantarella, 'Lo spazio dei monaci', *Settimane di studio del centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo (Uomo e spazio nell'alto medioevo)*, 50 (2003), 804–47 (p. 845). Sacred places as sites of power: D. L. Carmichael, 'Places of Power: Mescalero Apache Sacred Sites and Sensitive Areas', in *Sacred Sites, Sacred Places*, ed. D. Carmichael, J. Hubert, B. Reeves and A. Schanche (London, 1994), pp.89–98 (p.89).

anonymous monk who, at the beginning of the twelfth century, composed the *Miracula Sancti Adalardi* stated in his *prefatio* that the pleasantness of the site and the richness of the edifices, while being a clear sign of God's benevolence towards his abbey, were also sufficient to prove Corbie's splendid past (Fig. 13.1). He thus started his narration with a description of the various churches and of the different features of the surrounding landscape.<sup>5</sup> And this is also the reason why the choice — or, better, the discovery — of the site of the abbey was usually narrated as an almost supernatural exploration, an adventure in which it was actually God who guided the founder of the community.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, the foundation of a monastery caused in itself a redefinition of the relations between people and space. By entering a monastic community, men and women had to relocate themselves both physically and mentally. It is true that this repositioning did not completely obliterate the place of origin, and conflicts and divisions within a monastic community had often, for example, an undeniable (if, at times, slightly confused) ethnic connotation. However, individuals entering a monastery had to abandon their place of origin and their old selves, and find new connections in a largely new social and physical environment.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *De miraculis s. Adalhardi*, ed. O. Holder-Egger, MGH SS, 15.2 (Hannover, 1888), pp.859–65 (pp.860–61).

<sup>6</sup> On monastic narratives of foundation, see J. Kastner, *Historiae fundationum monasteriorum: Frühformen monastischer Institutionsgeschichtsschreibung im Mittelalter*, Münchener Beiträge zur Mediävistik und Renaissance-Forschung, 18 (Munich, 1978); Remensnyder, *Remembering Kings Past*; A. Sennis, 'Tradizione monastica e racconto delle origini in Italia centrale (secoli XI–XII)', *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome*, 115 (2003), 181–211.

<sup>7</sup> Examples of ethnic conflict within a monastic community: Sennis, 'Tradizione monastica e racconto delle origini', pp.207–09, and, for an episode involving Alcuin, Martinus Turonensis, *Vita Alcuini abbatis Turonensis*, ed. W. Arndt, MGH SS, 15.1 (Hannover, 1887), ch. 18, pp.193–94. Solemn vows that each individual entering a monastery had to pronounce: *Benedicti Regula*, ed. R. Hanslik, *Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, 75 (Vienna, 1960), ch. 58, 17–29. Monastic compulsory threefold abandonment (personal patrimony, family ties and homeland): G. Constable, 'The Ceremonies and Symbolism of Entering Religious Life and Taking the Monastic Habit, from the Fourth to the Twelfth Century', in *Settimane di studio del centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo (Segni e Riti della Chiesa Altomedievale)*, 33 (1987), 771–834. My use of the category of ethnicity here takes into account the concepts discussed, for example, in P. Geary, 'Ethnic Identity as a Situational Construct in the Early Middle Ages', *Mitteilungen der anthropologischen Gesellschaft in Wien*, 113 (1983), 15–26; W. Pohl and H. Reimitz, eds, *Strategies of Distinction: The Construction of Ethnic Communities, 300–800* (Leiden, 1998).

### *A Prophetic Vision*

Around the year 845 Anskar, the first great apostle to the North, was planning a new journey to Sweden, in order to continue his mission among those people. The Christianization of mainland Scandinavia had been successful only intermittently: it was some years since a cleric had been preaching in those lands and the region was at risk of lapsing back into paganism. This is what made both a new mission highly necessary and Anskar, its main advocate, somewhat distressed and anxious about it.

One night the saint had a vision. Sitting on a richly decorated throne and dressed like a prophet, Adalhard, the great but by then deceased abbot of the monastery of Corbie, where Anskar had been a pupil, appeared to his disciple. The purpose of the vision was to confirm to Anskar that his journey was going to be blessed by God's will and benevolence. In order to reassure Anskar that his mission was destined to success, Adalhard quoted some biblical verses: 'Hear you islands, and give ear you peoples from afar [...]. I have placed you here as a light for other nations. You must take my saving power, even until the end of the earth.' According to his biographer, these words made Anskar even more certain that he was being summoned by divine command 'because almost all that country consisted of islands' and 'because in the north the end of the world lay in Swedish territory'.<sup>8</sup>

Ecclesiastical communities had a strong inclination to look at the space around them in order to find that the perfect correspondence between divine will, natural laws and social order was materially reaffirmed in it. In his *Vita Columbani*, written in the first decades of the seventh century, Jonas of Bobbio recounted, for example, how one day Columbanus was considering whether he should undertake the evangelization of the Wends, a Slavic people. As he was ready to make his vows an angel appeared to him and drew a sketchy map of the world (*mundi compagem monstravit*). 'Look here,' this angelic vision said to Columbanus, 'how the world remains a desert. Go right and left, wherever you want, in order to eat the fruits

<sup>8</sup> Rimbert, *Vita Anskarii*, ed. W. Trillmich, in *Quellen des 9. und 11. Jahrhunderts zur Geschichte des Hamburgischen Kirche und des Reiches*, ed. W. Trillmich and R. Buchner (Darmstadt, 1961), ch. 25, pp.82–86. References to Anskar's distress for the fate of the missions and anxiety for his journey are, respectively, at p.82 and at p.84; the vision is at pp.84–86. The biblical passage quoted is Isaiah 49. 1. Many of Anskar's visions are characterized by the undertaking of a voyage (P. E. Dutton, *The Politics of Dreaming in the Carolingian Empire* (Lincoln and London, 1994), pp.51–53). On the theological and literary facets of the *Vita Anskarii*, see I. Wood, 'Christians and Pagans in Ninth-Century Scandinavia', in *The Christianization of Scandinavia*, ed. B. Sawyer, P. Sawyer and I. Wood (Alingsås, 1987), pp.36–67 (pp.39–42).

of your labour.' Hearing these words, and looking at that representation of the world, the saint understood that it was better if he changed his mind, and stayed where he was, until the time came for him to undertake his journey to Italy.<sup>9</sup>

As in Anskar's dream, in this episode of the life of Columbanus space was used as the principal medium to convey a divine message, and an understanding of the sense of the vision occurred without any problem or doubt. This happened because saints were considered to be blessed by the grace of having the chance to behold portions of the world usually forbidden to human eyes. In his *Commentary on Scipio's Dream*, a text of pivotal influence in the development of early medieval monastic culture, Macrobius argued for example that the vacuity of human glory was demonstrated by the fact that it could only extend to very limited sections of physical reality, so narrow and mundane when compared with the immensity of the cosmic space, perceivable only by the divinity.<sup>10</sup>

This meant that the (mutable) landscape in which monastic communities were set could be, and actually was, perceived, described, and sometimes imagined as a forceful representation of an eternal truth. In other words, in the early Middle Ages, nowhere were those elements so thoroughly combined and structured as in monasteries — in a system of thought that organized the surrounding world by placing the community at both its physical and its spiritual centre. In most cases these communities looked at the physical space around them in order to find their claims of social supremacy confirmed.

The geography of the site could therefore be described in order to certify this claimed supremacy. In his account of the foundation of the monastery by Emperor Louis II, the author of the *Chronicle of S. Clemente at Casauria* (Fig. 13.1), wrote that the emperor ordered the relics to be put on the back of a donkey. The animal was then let free to go wherever it wanted; it encountered a river, the river Pescara, miraculously floated on the water, and stopped in the middle of it,

<sup>9</sup> *Ionae Vitae sanctorum Columbani, Vedastis, Iohannis*, ed. B. Krusch, MGH SRG in usum scholarum, 37 (Hannover, 1905), I.27, p.217. This reference to the act of drawing *mundi compages* somewhat predates any surviving medieval map (see P. Gaultier Dalché, 'De la glose à la contemplation: Place et fonction de la carte dans les manuscrits du haut Moyen Âge', in *Settimane di studio del centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo (Testo e immagine nell'alto medioevo)*, 41 (1994), 693–764 (p.697)).

<sup>10</sup> Macrobius, *Commentarium in somnium Scipionis libri duo*, ed. L. Scarpa (Padua, 1981). A similar theme is developed in Gregory of Tours *Vita Sancti Venantii (Vitae Patrum)*, 17.5, ed. B. Krusch, MGH SRM, 1.2 (Hannover, 1885), p.732). On the influence of Macrobius's text on medieval monasticism, see P. Courcelle, 'La vision cosmique de saint Benoît', *Revue des études augustinienes*, 13 (1967), 97–117 (pp.110–14).

where there was an island. That was the site of the new abbey (whose full name was Saint Clement *de Casa aurea in Insula Piscarie*). The chronicler obviously wanted to establish a direct link between the story of how the saint's body was miraculously found floating by his disciple Phoebus, in spite of the fact that Aufidianus, the prefect, had ordered him to be drowned in the sea with an old anchor attached to his neck. The monastery was not built on an island yet that description was essential because physical and spiritual spaces needed to be made to agree in order to produce a coherent memorialized identity.<sup>11</sup>

### *The Return of Some Relics*

Some time during the year 893, the monks from the abbey of St Vaast in Arras, nowadays in north-eastern France (Pas-de-Calais), addressed a request to the bishop and the citizens of Beauvais: they wanted the remains of their patron back. Twelve years before, the community had in fact been obliged to abandon its site due to the attack of a band of Vikings, whose raids had been tormenting the northern shores of the Carolingian Empire for decades. The monks had fled to Beauvais, taking with them the casket in which the relics of St Vaast were preserved. Otto, at the time bishop of the city, had received the community with honour and had ordered that the relics be interred in the cathedral in order to be properly worshipped.

Now the danger seemed to be over, the site of the abbey had been repopulated by monks coming from various parts of the region, the walls had been repaired, and a new series of ditches had been excavated around them. However, the physical reoccupation of the site by the community had evidently not been enough to bring the monastery back to its old glory. The absence of the saint from his original resting place meant that the community was still destitute and the future did not look hopeful. This was why the monks wanted to bring the body of their patron back where they felt it belonged.

Understandably, when faced with the prospect of being deprived of such a precious thing, the people of Beauvais turned a deaf ear. It took a lot of argument, and the benign intervention of the new bishop of Beauvais, Honoratus, to convince them to return the relics. The arrival to Arras of those revered remains must

<sup>11</sup> 'Liber instrumentorum de possessionibus, rebus, sive dignitatibus, quas Casauriense monasterium habuit, habet, vel habere debet': Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fonds latin 5411, cc. 20<sup>v</sup>–22<sup>r</sup>; L. A. Muratori, *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, 25 vols (Milan, 1726), II.2, cols 767–1018 (col. 781).

have taken place in an incredible scenario. According to the account of this episode, most probably penned by a monk from St Vaast who eye-witnessed these events, not only a multitude of clerics, but also the whole of the rural population gathered to pray and worship at the homecoming of the sacred body.<sup>12</sup>

The place that a monastery occupied in the world was not simply physical, and the reoccupation of the original site was not necessarily sufficient to bring a community back to its previous splendour. This is confirmed by the fact that the material destruction of sacred places or objects, or the abandonment of the site, could at times be invoked as the cause — real or claimed — of the loss of memories and traditions, in other words of the community's identity. This is for example the case of the monastery of Novalesa, in northern Italy (Fig. 13.1). According to the chronicler who, in the first half of the eleventh century, collected the traditions of his community, when the Saracens had attacked the abbey in the first half of the tenth century the community had been obliged to flee. The site had remained abandoned for some thirty years and this had resulted in such oblivion that the monks could not even remember the location of the most venerated graves. They therefore had to ask a woman, two hundred years old, to guide them around the site. The very old woman is a narrative expedient symbolizing the fact that the memory of individual places could indeed have been temporarily eclipsed but that the link between the community and its past had not been completely cut and it was possible to rediscover it, as it was possible to rediscover, sometimes to invent, the sacred graves.<sup>13</sup>

The loss of memory, due to the abandonment of the original site, could indeed have consequences more serious than those suffered by the monks of Novalesa. As is well known, after the first destruction in 581 by the Lombards, the monks of Montecassino stayed in Rome for more than a century (Fig. 13.1). Only in 717, guided by Petronax, was monastic life re-established at Montecassino. Petronax, helped by some hermits that had continued to live on the site, and by the three

<sup>12</sup> *Sermo de relatione corporis Beati Vedasti*, in *Monumenta Vedastina Minora*, ed. O. Holder-Egger, MGH SS, 15 (Hannover, 1887), pp.396–405 (pp.402–04, 404). Use of relics in Carolingian Europe: P. Geary, *Furta Sacra: Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages*, rev. edn with new preface (Princeton, 1991). Relics as an attractive source of power: S. Boesch Gajano, 'Reliques et pouvoir', in *Les Reliques: Objects, Cultes, Symboles*, ed. E. Bozóky and A. M. Helvétius (Turnhout, 1999), pp.255–69.

<sup>13</sup> *Cronaca di Novalesa*, ed. G. C. Alessio (Turin, 1982), ch. 13, p.112. For the comparable case of the monastery of Nonantola, see *Translatio et miracula sanctorum Senesii et Theopontii*, ed. P. E. Schramm, MGH SS, 30.2 (Leipzig, 1934), pp.984–92 (p.987).

young Beneventans Paldo, Taso and Tato (who had just founded the abbey of S. Vincenzo al Volturno), repaired the ruined buildings and gave a new start to the community, whose identity was mainly founded on the fact that it was there, on that precise site, that Saint Benedict was buried (even if, as I will discuss later, nobody seemed to know exactly where). On the other hand, though, at least by the beginning of the eighth century, a different tradition started to circulate. According to this version of the events, while the community was in Rome, some monks from the monastery of Fleury arrived at Montecassino to honour the burial of the father of western monasticism. Once they arrived on site, the only thing they found were ruins, and there was nobody who could tell them where the grave was. Only by chance did these monks find the stone that identified the burial of Benedict and of his sister Scholastica. They uncovered that abandoned tomb, took the sacred bones, and brought them to France, to give them the burial they deserved.<sup>14</sup> According to the Fleury version, the transalpine monks had been right in doing so because the monastery of Montecassino did not exist any more, since its community had abandoned the site. And it is interesting to notice that those hermits who, according to the Cassinese version of the events, had continued to live on site represented the actual claim that the site had not been abandoned completely, and that the physical space had continued to be an essential component of the memorial identity of the community.

### *Spaces of Monks, Spaces of Power*

A foundation, a prophetic vision, the happy ending of some relics' exile: at first sight the three episodes I have outlined might appear to have little in common and to be hard to connect, set apart as they are by time and space. However, at a closer look, at least the narratives in which these episodes are embedded do show some consistency, some comparable features.<sup>15</sup>

The first thing that these three stories have in common is that, as I have stressed, in one way or the other, and more or less explicitly, they all talk about

<sup>14</sup> *Translatio corporis s. Benedicti in Franciam*, ed. R. Weber, *Revue bénédictine*, 62 (1952), 140–42. On the lack of knowledge of the location of Benedict's tomb, see below, p.291.

<sup>15</sup> On the intricate relationships between texts, the events they (purportedly) relate, and the social contexts in which they come into being and circulate, from the point of view of a medievalist, see G. M. Spiegel, *The Past as Text: The Theory and Practice of Medieval Historiography* (Baltimore, 1997).

space. The space of which these three stories talk is, first of all, vividly physical: the forests and fields of central Germany; the islands and waters of the extreme north; a monastery and a city in north-eastern France. However, the space of which these three stories talk is also, undeniably, a mental image: the power of a wilderness that clearly stands for the eastern deserts of the monastic tradition; the blankness of a landscape destitute of the Christian God; the desolation of an abbey filled again with monks but still felt as empty, deprived as it is of the body of its patron.

Secondly, even if they relate events chronologically and geographically distant one from the other, these three narratives were put together in a quite coherent framework. The *Life of Sturm* — who, after founding Fulda, became its first abbot — was written by one of his successors, Eigil, around 800; the *Life of Anskar* was composed between 865 and 876; the story of the translation of the relics of Saint Vaast was compiled in the immediate aftermath of the event, in the early 890s.<sup>16</sup>

The period in which these narratives were composed can be defined as a second, mature phase of the political, institutional and cultural parabola of the Carolingians. After the conquests through which, in the second half of the eighth century, the kingdom of the Franks had reached European dimensions, the expansion had at first slowed down and then stopped; the territory had been reorganized; new missionary waves had endeavoured to shift the frontiers of Christianity to the north and to the east. The political, economic, cultural and religious horizon had thus adjusted to include other counterparts, other allies, other enemies.<sup>17</sup>

It is difficult to say whether the establishment of this new, wider scenario had a direct influence on how people, or at least the members of the intellectual elites, looked at the world around them. What can be said, though, is that it is precisely in those decades that a transformation of the ways in which space was represented seems to have occurred.

<sup>16</sup> See, respectively, Engelbert, *Die Vita Sturmi*, pp.16–20; I. Wood, *The Missionary Life: Saints and the Evangelisation of Europe 400–1050* (London, 2001), pp.52, 125; *Sermo de relatione corporis Beati Vedasti*, p.396.

<sup>17</sup> On the period see, in general, P. Godman and R. Collins, eds, *Charlemagne's Heir: New Perspectives on the Reign of Louis the Pious (814–840)* (Oxford, 1990); J. Nelson, *Charles the Bald* (London, 1992); S. MacLean, *Kingship and Politics in the Late Ninth Century: Charles the Fat and the End of the Carolingian Empire* (Cambridge, 2003). Frankish missions of the eighth and ninth centuries: R. Fletcher, *The Conversion of Europe: From Paganism to Christianity 371–1386 AD* (London, 1997), pp.193–284; and, with a particular focus on the narratives of the missions, Wood, *Missionary Life*, pp.57–141.



For example when, between 842 and 847, Hraban Maur devoted to geography books XI–XIII of his *De rerum naturis* (a work later known as *De universo*), he drew on Isidore's *Etymologiae* but consistently interpreted the latter's descriptions using the transcendent and mystical categories of the *sensus spiritualis*.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, the works of cosmographers such as Dicuil (whose *De mensura orbis terrae* was written in 825 and dedicated to Louis the Pious) and the anonymous monk author of the *De situ orbis* (active at Ferrières or Auxerre between 856 and 870) demonstrate that the geographical picture that was presented was not the one inherited from classical antiquity. Rather, what was described was a new and reorganized world, one in which the role of the Mediterranean as structural axis was secondary to that assigned to the Ocean. These monks, whose works were conceived to be employed in the teaching of geography, still used ancient sources but altered the information they found in them in order to include the islands of northern Europe, ignore the lands south and east of the Mediterranean, and strongly emphasize the navigability of the Ocean. Moreover, both authors proved to be quite aware of what can be defined as the geo-politics of the late Carolingian world and in more than one point of their works stressed the impact of the Vikings on the, human as well as physical, geography of northern Europe. The author of the *De situ orbis* even explicitly stated in his prologue that he had been prompted to get down to work by some members of his community who wanted to have a clearer idea of the routes followed by the Vikings for their incursions.<sup>19</sup>

Lastly, all these three narratives are the outcome of a monastic culture. Even if, strictly speaking, it was produced in the episcopal milieu of Hamburg-Bremen,

<sup>18</sup> *Rabani Mauri. De universo libri viginti duo*, ed. J. P. Migne, Patrologia Latina, 111 (Paris, 1841–64), cols 9–614 (cols 309–76). Hraban as reader and utilizer of Isidore: J. Fontaine, 'Isidore de Séville et la mutation de l'encyclopédisme antique', in *Tradition et actualité chez Isidore de Séville*, ed. J. Fontaine, special issue, *Cahiers d'histoire mondiale / Journal of World History / Cuadernos del Historia Mundial*, 9.3 (1966), 519–38 (pp. 536–37). Change of title from *De rerum naturis* to *De universo*: E. Heyse, *Hrabanus Maurus Enzyklopädie 'De rerum naturis'* (Munich, 1969), pp. 2–3.

<sup>19</sup> *De mensura orbis terrae*, ed. J. Tierney and L. Bieler, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae*, 6 (Dublin, 1967) pp. 44–103; *De situ orbis*, ed. R. Quadri (Padua, 1974). On these issues, see P. Gaultier Dalché, 'Tradition et renouvellement dans la représentation de l'espace géographique au IX<sup>e</sup> siècle', *Studi medievali*, 3rd series, 24 (1983), 121–65 (pp. 142–65). A different view is taken by N. Lozovsky, *The Earth is Our Book: Geographical Knowledge in the Latin West ca. 400–1000* (Ann Arbor, 2000), pp. 154–55, where it is argued that the geographical knowledge of this period essentially reproduced the image of the world that had been familiar since antiquity, and tended to ignore contemporary reality.

the *Vita Anskarii* can in fact also be considered as the product of a fully monastic context. Before becoming bishop of Bremen and then archbishop of Hamburg, Anskar had completed all his education and career first at Corbie and then at Corvey. Rimbert, his biographer as well as successor on the Hamburg see, had also been educated in a monastery, Turholt. Moreover, while undertaking his narrative task he was in close contact with the community at Corbie, to which he dedicated his work, and with one member in particular, the predestinarian theologian Ratramnus.

In the evolution of the social, economic, political, cultural and religious structures that occurred in early medieval Europe, those monastic communities were sometimes the protagonists, sometimes the victims, most of the time the narrators, always the guardians of memory.<sup>20</sup> Besides, those places of worship were always in close relation to different forms of powers, and their members were among the protagonists of change — in political, institutional and social structures, in models of territorial identity, in the organization of landowning, for example. The focal role that monasteries had with respect to the surrounding society is mirrored in the fact that monastic sources allow us to relate the changes in land organization to changes in the mental structures of society, and in the way people perceived the space around them.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Absolute pre-eminence of churches, and especially monasteries, in the transmission of texts and documents in early medieval Europe: P. Cammarosano, *Italia medievale: Geografia e storia delle fonti scritte* (Rome, 1991), pp.39–111. Anskar's strong monastic profile: W. Haas, 'Foris apostolus – intus monachus: Ansgar als Mönch und "Apostel des Nordens"', *Journal of Medieval History*, 11 (1985), 1–30. Rimbert's upbringing and career: *Vita Rimberti*, ed. G. Waitz, MGH SRG in usum scholarum, 55 (Hannover, 1884), pp.80–100.

<sup>21</sup> A. Guerreau, 'Le champ sémantique de l'espace dans la *vita* de saint Maieul (Cluny, début du XI<sup>e</sup> siècle)', *Journal des Savants* (1997), 363–420. C. Sonnlechner, 'The Establishment of New Units of Production in Carolingian Times: Making Early Medieval Sources Relevant for Environmental History', *Viator*, 35 (2004), 21–48. Centrality of a monastery within a given society: B. H. Rosenwein, *To Be the Neighbor of Saint Peter: The Social Meaning of Cluny's Property 909–1049* (Ithaca and London, 1989). In this essay I use evidence from male communities, mainly owing to the nature of the sources I am more familiar with. On the relations between gender and exterior space, see S. S. Morrison, *Women Pilgrims in Late Medieval England: Private Piety as Public Performance* (London, 2000), pp.83–93; K. Heene, 'Gender and Mobility in the Low Countries: Travelling Women in Thirteenth-Century Exempla and Saints Lives', in *The Texture of Society: Medieval Women in the Southern Low Countries*, ed. E. E. Kittell and M. A. Suydam (London, 2004), pp.31–49. R. Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture: The Archaeology of Religious Women* (London and New York, 1994), discusses monastic concepts and symbols of (mainly interior) space with regard to female communities.

*Space as Discourse*

It has to be said that the use of space as a central element of a system of representation is not, in principle, exclusive either to early medieval monastic communities or, more generally, to religious elites.<sup>22</sup> The need to interpret geography in the framework of dynamics of culture, and power, and the use of texts as media to convey an explanation of the landscape as part of a political strategy are in fact quite pervasive phenomena, common to different social groups and to different historical contexts. Space is indeed a cultural image.<sup>23</sup> To take just one example, from the seventh century onwards the creation of royal forests concretely projected on the physical landscape the polarization laics and clerics created by the rituals of hunting, from which the latter had been barred since the beginning of the sixth century. This projection, codified in writing by the law, was no less mental than material: the areas reserved to royal hunting were in fact not always necessarily fenced, and the demarcation of the space often relied on social dynamics.<sup>24</sup>

This is also true if we consider the dynamics through which single elements, or portions, of the space become sacred. Most societies, in order to define their own distinctive sacred topography, tend in fact to look at different parts of the surrounding space, not only monuments, and draw upon memory and tradition.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> The most seminal examples of how, in different contexts, the articulation of space can be interpreted, on the one hand, as a symbolic ordering of the world and, on the other, as an expression of institutional interests are, respectively, P. Bourdieu, 'The Kabyle House or the World Reversed', in Bourdieu, *Algeria 1960* (Cambridge, 1979), pp.133–53; and M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Harmondsworth, 1977). See also M. Foucault, 'Espace, savoir et pouvoir', in Foucault, *Dits et Écrit 1954–1988*, 4 vols (Paris, 1994), IV, 270–85.

<sup>23</sup> D. Cosgrove and S. Daniels, eds, *The Iconography of Landscape* (Cambridge, 1988), p.1. See also J. B. Harley, 'Maps, Knowledge, and Power', in *ibid.*, pp.277–312.

<sup>24</sup> Wickham, 'European Forests in the Early Middle Ages', pp.160–61, cites the relevant laws. See also R. Hennebicque, 'Espaces sauvages et chasses royales dans le Nord de la France, VII<sup>e</sup>–IX<sup>e</sup> siècle', *Revue du Nord*, 62 (1980), 35–60. The bipartition of hunting (hunting with dogs/hunting with falcons) has been recently put in symbolic relation with the bipartition of the scenario in which it took place (inside/outside the forest): hunting would have contributed to the polarization of space in the Middle Ages. See A. Guerreau, 'Chasse', in *Dictionnaire Raisoné de l'Occident Médiéval*, ed. J. Le Goff and J.-C. Schmitt (Paris, 1999), pp.166–78, esp. pp.168–72.

<sup>25</sup> D. O'Sullivan, 'Space, Silence and Shortage on Lindisfarne: The Archaeology of Asceticism', in *Image and Power in the Archaeology of Early Medieval Britain: Essays in Honour of Rosemary Cramp*, ed. H. Hamerow and A. MacGregor (Oxford, 2001), pp.33–52 (p.36).

However, the perception of space and its general system of representation did change in the transition from antiquity to the Middle Ages, largely due to the influence of the developing Christian system of thought. For medieval clerics the world was in fact not only the physical reality but was also constituted by the whole of human history: space and time were inextricably tied.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, for example, in the seventh century the Irish monk Adomnán, in relating a prophecy regarding Columba's fame, explicitly linked the end of time to the end of the known land. Moreover, in the early Middle Ages particularly large world maps aimed at portraying the course of universal history in symbiosis with the whole of historical space.

This mental framework, in which time and space are indissolubly bound together, is further revealed by the widespread circulation, in the Middle Ages, of the legend of Alexander the Great. In this romance Alexander imprisoned Gog and Magog until the end of time on what was then conceived as the ultimate inviolable barrier: the Caucasus. For the enclosed nations geographical and temporal prisons therefore coincided.<sup>27</sup>

This progressive permeation of space and time was one of the crucial developments of Western Christian mentality, a system of thought that, for at least the first three centuries of its history, was strongly hostile to the idea that any physical site should be venerated. It was in the course of the fourth century that the concept of a Christian sacred topography slowly began to catch on. The traditional importance of the past in the framework of the Christian faith was thus combined with the developing need to identify, physically as well as ethically, the Church of the present with the Church of the early martyrs. This resulted in the sacralization of specific places, that is the materialization, in some definite points of the landscape, of the sacredness of time.<sup>28</sup> It was indeed western monasticism,

<sup>26</sup> A. Guerreau, *L'avenir d'un passé incertain: Quelle histoire du Moyen Âge au XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle?* (Paris, 2001), p.233.

<sup>27</sup> Adomnán: T. O'Loughlin, 'Living in the Ocean', in *Studies in the Cult of Columba*, ed. C. Bourke (Dublin, 1997), pp.11–23 (p.20). Medieval maps: A. D. von den Brincken, 'Mappa Mundi und Chronographia', *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters*, 24 (1968), 118–86; and E. Edson, *Mapping Time and Space: How Medieval Mapmakers Viewed their World* (London, 1997). Legend of Alexander: A. H. Anderson, *Alexander's Gate: Gog and Magog and the Inclosed Nations* (Cambridge, MA, 1932). Caucasus as an inviolable limit: A. Giardina, 'Roma e il Caucaso', *Settimane di studio del centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo (Il Caucaso: cerniera fra culture dal Mediterraneo alla Persia (secoli IV–XI))*, 43 (1996), 85–141 (pp.86–89).

<sup>28</sup> R. A. Markus, 'How on Earth Could Places Become Holy? Origins of the Christian Idea of Holy Places', *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 2 (1994), 257–71 (pp.268–71), arguing against Mircea Eliade's idea that it is almost tautological that every religion provides itself with sacred

especially in the context of its prescriptive texts, which really redefined the notion of space.<sup>29</sup>

The various monastic rules provide in fact evidence of the development of a new sense of space and of a quite original effort to modify the physical framework of social life. Moreover, in the transition from the texts concerning the earlier desert fathers to the cenobitic rules there seems to be a clear development, a progressive process of construction of represented space. This development did not occur without contradictions, and in the Carolingian and post-Carolingian epochs, monastic chroniclers seem, at times, to have been aware of the fact that too long and detailed a description of the landscape surrounding their community could indeed contravene the biblical tradition, by putting too much emphasis on the place in relation to the community.<sup>30</sup> However, in the course of time the physical desert of the eastern fathers became an ideological scenario for western monks, and it is indeed significant that what can be defined as the 'myth of the desert' enjoyed a long-lasting fortune in the Middle Ages becoming, for example, a cornerstone of Cistercian ideology.<sup>31</sup>

### *Space and Memory*

At times, a community's capability to control the processes of description, interpretation and memorization of space could be more avowed than actual. Among the wave of immigrants who, between the 840s and 870s, followed the imperial

sites. For a critique of Eliade's approach, and for an analysis of the fundamental dichotomy between locative and utopian (and, as such, non-locative) orientations in religion, see also J. Z. Smith, *Map Is Not Territory* (Leiden, 1978), esp. pp.1–23.

<sup>29</sup> J. Le Goff, 'Discorso di chiusura', *Settimane di studio del centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo (Popoli e paesi nella cultura altomedievale)*, 29 (1983), 805–38 (p.823).

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, *Ex miraculis et translationibus s. Bavonis*, ed. Holder-Egger, MGH SS, 15.2, pp.589–99 (p.591). (The author quotes II Maccabees 5. 19: 'But the Lord did not choose the nation for the sake of the holy place, but the place for the sake of the nation.')

<sup>31</sup> B. Ward, 'The Desert Myth: Reflections on the Desert Ideal in Early Cistercian Monasticism', in *One Yet Two: Monastic Tradition in East and West*, Orthodox-Cistercian Symposium (Kalamazoo, 1976), pp.183–99. Ideological use of the eastern deserts in western early monasticism: H. Löwe, 'Westliche Peregrination und Mission: Ihr Zusammenhang mit den Länder und Völkerkundlichen Kenntnissen des früheren Mittelalters', in *Settimane*, 29 (1983), 327–72; P. Noisette, 'Usages et représentations de l'espace dans la Regula Benedicti: Une nouvelle approche des significations historiques de la Règle', *Regulae Benedicti Studia: Annuario internazionale*, 14–15 (1985–86), 69–80 (pp.69–70).

expeditions in central Italy, Frankish and Alamannic settlers continued, for example, to describe the land they were acquiring according to an administrative vocabulary that they had learnt in their places of origin, regardless of the style used by the monastery they were dealing with, S. Clemente at Casauria.<sup>32</sup> And monasteries could also be obliged to turn to local communities to make up for their lack of knowledge of the territory they controlled. Therefore when, between the end of the twelfth and the beginning of the thirteenth centuries, Rainaldus, abbot of the monastery of S. Salvatore alla Maiella, some 150 km east of Rome, decided to commission the compilation of a cartulary, the community knew practically nothing about the consistency and articulation of its revenues (Fig. 13.1). The information necessary in order to accomplish the cartulary had to come from sworn testimonies of the inhabitants of the communities surrounding the monastery.<sup>33</sup>

This lack of knowledge could even extend to the internal spaces of a monastery, and in some cases the community seems not to have any idea about the location of illustrious graves, which one would expect to be the memorial focus of a monastery, at least in principle. For example, at the end of the tenth century the author of the chronicle of the monastery of Saint Andrew on Monte Soratte, some kilometres north of Rome, wrote of how his community had once been visited by Charlemagne, shortly after his imperial coronation (Fig. 13.1). According to the monk, the emperor donated to the community some relics of Saint Andrew, and these relics were put in a grave and venerated. However, he could not tell where this grave was.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Examples (all dated between 873 and 880): Allo 'ex genere Francorum' who declares himself 'habitor in pago Teatense' ('Liber instrumentorum', cols 86'–86'); Sisenandus 'ex genere Francorum' who declares that the properties he is selling are located 'in loco qui dicitur Casauria, in pago Pinnensi' (ibid., cols 75'–76'); Ainardus 'ex genere Alamannorum' who declares himself 'habitor in pago Teatense' (ibid., col. 91'); Johannes 'ex genere Alamannorum' who declares himself 'habitor in pago Pinnense' (ibid., col. 93'); Rimo 'ex genere Alamannorum', who declares himself 'habitor in pago Pinnense' (ibid., col. 97', and cols 99'–99'); Sanson 'ex genere Francorum' who declares himself 'habitor in pago Balvense' (ibid., cols 114'–114'); Ildeprand 'ex genere Francorum' who declares himself 'habitor in pago teatino' (ibid., cols 115'–116'). *Pagus* is not a term commonly used to describe districts in central Italy. On transalpine immigrants to Italy in the early Middle Ages, see E. Hlawitschka, *Franken, Alemannen, Bayern und Burgunder in Oberitalien (774–962): Zum Verständnis der fränkischen Königsherrschaft in Italien* (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1960).

<sup>33</sup> Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Archivio di S. Pietro, Caps. 72, fasc. 53, col. 29 (partial edition of the manuscript in *Collectionis Bullarum Sacrosanctae Basilicae Vaticanae* (Rome 1747), pp.i–liii).

<sup>34</sup> *Il Chronicon di Benedetto di S. Andrea del Soratte e il Libellus de imperatoria potestate in urbe Roma*, ed. G. Zucchetti (Rome, 1920), p.116.

Sometimes this lack of knowledge is even more striking. At Montecassino, the place where Saint Benedict was allegedly buried was accidentally found during the great renovation of the abbey church started, in 1066, by Abbot Desiderius. Everything suggests that the discovery was casual, and in fact Desiderius had to modify the original plan of the basilica that, in the final version, had an elevated presbytery in order not to touch the sacred remains.<sup>35</sup> On the other hand, when Emperor Henry II visited the monastery in June 1022 and expressed doubts on the fact that Saint Benedict was really buried at Montecassino and not, as claimed by a quite credible tradition, in the French monastery of Fleury, the community could not say anything and the emperor was convinced only when, during a night of torment due to what appears to have been colic, he had a vision of the saint who told him that his pain would stop only if he was convinced that the monks of Fleury were lying about his burial.<sup>36</sup>

The monks of the other great Italian imperial abbey, S. Clemente at Casauria, experienced similar problems. There the community claimed that, in founding the monastery in the 870s, Emperor Louis II had buried the relics of Saint Clement somewhere, but they did not know where. It took them a long time, and lots of miraculous appearances by the saint himself, to convince a series of papal legates who wanted, in the 1150s, to establish if the saint was buried there or in the basilica of Saint Clement in Rome.<sup>37</sup>

Certainly, these types of oblivion could be strategically concocted in order to sustain otherwise groundless claims: the monks of Casauria had to deal with a — for them — very unfavourable *Translatio Sancti Clementis* written by no less a person than Leo of Ostia, who claimed that the relics of the martyr had never left Rome; maybe, when Henry II arrived at Montecassino, the body of Saint Benedict had indeed been long moved to Fleury; maybe the monastery on the Monte Soratte had never possessed any relics of Saint Andrew. What is important to stress is the fact that the coexistence of a more or less justified liturgy of memory

<sup>35</sup> *Chronica Monasterii Casinensis*, III.26, ed. H. Hoffmann, MGH SS, 24 (Hannover, 1980), p.395. See also *Il sepolcro di S. Benedetto*, Miscellanea cassinese, 27 (Montecassino, 1951); P. Meyvaert, 'Peter the Deacon and the Tomb of Saint Benedict', *Revue bénédictine*, 65 (1955), 3–70.

<sup>36</sup> *Chronica Monasterii Casinensis*, II.43, ed. Hoffmann, pp.247–49.

<sup>37</sup> A. Pratesi, 'Ubi corpus beati Clementis papae et martyris requiescit', in *Contributi per una storia dell'Abruzzo adriatico nel medioevo* (Chieti, 1992), pp.115–31.

and a more or less opportunistic caducity of memories appears to be normal and dealt with with self-confident awareness.<sup>38</sup>

### *Complex Spaces*

The interaction between community and space could take place at the highest possible level, such as the one constituted by the intellectual crème of the Carolingian elites. In that case, the result could be a real turning point in western civilization. The space that the Carolingian monks of the ninth century observed, remembered and imagined was a new world. It was new because the political scenario had changed, but it was new also because it was described and understood in new ways, using new cultural categories.

Even when the interaction occurred at a more local level, monastic communities not only used the space around them, but also placed their interpretations of it in the context of a rich and articulated set of practices of liturgical memory from which their members could, and did, draw systematically and collectively, in order to define the present and carve out for themselves spheres of dominion. Those shared interpretations of the surrounding space, and the apparatus of practices which substantiated and perpetuated them, could be arranged in a real theology of memory and oblivion, through the liturgical prayer of intercession for the living and the dead.<sup>39</sup>

Space pre-exists, and is independent from, human experience. However, it is qualified by people, explained by their language, organized by their activity. In other words, by determining spatial categories (or, to put it more simply, by deciding what the 'proper place' for things is), most societies also create and qualify cultural concepts. These concepts have a strong linguistic dimension but, in general, spatial perceptions rely on a system of representations of space that is more articulated than the one coded in language.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Emphasis on the imaginative component of this set of perceptions, particularly with regard to the community's past, is placed by Remensnyder, *Remembering Kings Past*, pp.1–4.

<sup>39</sup> Relations between community, commemoration and memory: O. G. Oexle, 'Memoria und Memorialüberlieferung im früheren Mittelalter', in *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 10 (1976), 70–95. See also P. Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance: Memory and Oblivion at the End of the First Millennium* (Princeton, 1995); Remensnyder, *Remembering Kings Past*.

<sup>40</sup> M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, new edn (London, 2002), esp. pp.44–50; Cantarella, 'Lo spazio dei monaci', p.808. Morrison, *Women*



Today the term space corresponds, in its current use, to the notion of Euclidean space. This is not the case for the Middle Ages, because there is no medieval word that can be considered its equivalent: *spatium* meant interval, distance, nothing more.<sup>41</sup> On the other hand, as we have seen, a complex and articulated perception of space not only existed in the Middle Ages, but was entirely central to people's mentality. At Iona, for example, the sea was a fundamental element of the community's spiritual and ideological sense of identity, and at Lindisfarne the whole surrounding landscape was interpreted according to the principles of biblical exegesis.

In the mind of late antique and early medieval clerics every element of the world that senses could experience was, in other words, also a symbol of an invisible reality.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, space (or, better, the control of it, in all senses) was then, as it is now, indispensable to any exercise of power.

*Pilgrims in Late Medieval England*, p.84. Language and space: S. C. Lavinson, 'Space: Linguistic Expression', in *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 29 vols (Amsterdam, 2001), xxii, 14749–52 (p.14749). See also L. Talmy, 'How Language Structures Space', in *Spatial Orientation: Theory, Research, and Application*, ed. H. L. Pick, Jr, and L. P. Acredolo (New York, 1983), pp.225–82; S. Svorou, *The Grammar of Space* (Amsterdam, 1994), pp.1–40.

<sup>41</sup> A. Guerreau, 'Structure et évolution des représentations de l'espace dans le haut Moyen Âge occidental', *Settimane*, 50 (2003), 91–115 (pp.93–94). At times the term *spatium* could be explicitly referred to temporal determinations, as it also happens nowadays. For some Italian examples, see *Chartularium Cupersanense*, ed. D. Morea (Montecassino, 1892), I, no. 2 (May 889), pp.3–5 (p.5); *Codice diplomatico del monastero benedettino di S. Maria di Tremiti (1005–1237)*, ed. A. Petrucci (Rome, 1960), II, no. 17 (October 1035), pp.57–59 (p.59); *Chronica Monasterii Casinensis*, ed. Hoffmann, pp.129, 327, 522, 557. On the relations between space and time, see above, p.288. Use of spatial references to express units of time in the late Middle Ages: J. Paul, 'Expression et perception du temps d'après l'enquête sur les miracles de Louis d'Anjou', in *Temps, mémoire, tradition au Moyen Âge* (Aix-en-Provence, 1983), pp.19–41 (pp.33–34); and R. Bartlett, *The Hanged Man: A Story of Miracle, Memory and Colonialism in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, 2004), pp.63–67.

<sup>42</sup> G. de Nie, 'Seeing and Believing in the Early Middle Ages: A Preliminary Investigation', in de Nie, *Word, Image and Experience: Dynamics of Miracle and Self-Perception in Sixth-Century Gaul* (Aldershot, 2003), ch. VII, p.69. For Iona and Lindisfarne, see, respectively, O'Loughlin, 'Living in the Ocean'; O'Sullivan, 'Space, Silence and Shortage on Lindisfarne'. On monastic space, see also, for a later period, M. Cassidy-Welch, *Monastic Spaces and their Meanings: Thirteenth-Century English Cistercian Monasteries* (Turnhout, 2001). Some interesting ideas may be found in D. Harrison, *Medieval Space: The Extent of Microspatial Knowledge in Western Europe during the Middle Ages* (Lund, 1996). For a more general discussion, see also G.-G. Granger, *La pensée de l'espace* (Paris, 1999) and the essays collected in F. Remotti, P. Scardulli and U. Fabietti, eds, *Centri, ritualità, potere: Significati antropologici dello spazio* (Bologna, 1989).

It is this complexity of values that helps explain how, and why, those monastic communities underpinned their efforts of social supremacy by constantly drawing, rightly or wrongly, on their vocation to turn space into memory, memory into texts, texts into power.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>43</sup> For space as a fundamental component of power, see M. Foucault, 'The Eye of Power', in Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977* (New York, 1980), pp.146–65 (p.149). I am grateful to Wendy Davies, Paul Fouracre, David d'Avray, Nick Everett and Chris Wickham for their comments on an earlier version of this paper. They are not responsible for any of my mistakes or shortcomings.

## POPULATIONS, TERRITORY AND COMMUNITY MEMBERSHIP: CONTRASTS AND CONCLUSIONS

Wendy Davies

Sharing approaches to people and space in different parts of western Europe in the Middle Ages has been a stimulating and enriching experience for those who have worked together on this book; and it has had some unexpected results. One of the most striking of the latter is the influence of national historiographical traditions. The Spanish framework is dominated by progress towards the feudalization of society and the emergence of a well-grounded military aristocracy in the tenth and eleventh centuries; it is also immensely influenced by the backlash against the eighth-century depopulation theories which characterized much twentieth-century Spanish writing. Hence, those who now write tend to emphasize long continuities and the social antecedents of those emerging aristocracies; and there is, on the whole, more interest in hierarchy than in community. The English framework has its search for continuities too: it is especially marked by the belief that pre-existing large units of ownership split to form smaller estates, notably in the ninth and tenth centuries (called ‘multiple estates’ by some writers, although not by those contributing here<sup>1</sup>), and by the belief that **parish**\* boundaries reflect estate boundaries. Those who write now, therefore, hesitate to investigate the relationship between church community and proprietor’s community because there is a strong belief that they were coterminous. The Icelandic writers in this book are more noticeable for denying the

<sup>1</sup> For example, R. Fleming, ‘Lords and Labour’, in *From the Vikings to the Normans: The Short Oxford History of the British Isles (800–1100)*, ed. W. Davies (Oxford, 2003), pp.107–37 (pp.108–11); Glanville Jones was the most forceful exponent of this theory, for example in G. R. J. Jones, ‘Multiple Estates and Early Settlement’, in *Medieval Settlement: Continuity and Change*, ed. P. H. Sawyer (London, 1976), pp.15–40.

predominating Icelandic historiography than perpetuating it; these contributors explicitly strive to get away from traditional approaches, opposing especially the concept that the settlement of Iceland occurred through the initiatives of free farmers, exercising something like democratic rights. They therefore tend to emphasize the initiatives of chiefs, and devote more time than most other contributors to methodology. The French and Frankish pieces are an exception to this trend and fall less obviously within any national historiographical framework — perhaps because the writers are English. Given the strength and distinctiveness of most of these national approaches, we need to be alert to the distinction between genuine regional differences and those that are simply the product of different national perceptions.

All contributors have a concern with territory and they deal with it in different ways. Two essays in particular are concerned with physical markers, those of Reynolds and Langlands on the English Wansdyke and of Lárusdóttir on earthworks in north-east Iceland. The former argue strongly for the interpretation of Wansdyke as a political frontier of the West Saxon kingdom, the massive linear earthwork being an expression of political capacity to control labour. The latter argues for earthworks in Reykjahverfi as separators between (early) farms, as also between infield and outfield within farms; some of the earthworks went out of use at a relatively early stage as some farmsteads were abandoned and property was consolidated, perhaps as a result of planned abandonment. It would not be appropriate to propose either regional similarity or regional difference on the basis of these two papers, but there is enough to note both political and proprietary uses of earthworks in our period. That fact is more important than it might seem: linear features in the landscape can arise for both kinds of reason, marking political frontiers and property boundaries; indeed, to the extent that early Icelandic earthworks marked chieftains' property, they might mark both together; but they do not necessarily have to do with any kind of local community. Others, Vésteinsson and Escalona especially, have emphasized that earthworks and linear features are in fact unusual: many property boundaries utilized natural features, whether to join or to separate, although turf or stone 'cairns' marked corners in Iceland, roads are well-known as boundary markers in Spanish Castile, and crosses might be used almost anywhere. The natural features included the streams, springs, ditches, trees, woods, stones, ridges, meadows and heaths that are so familiar from the boundary clauses of Anglo-Saxon and Welsh charters, but are not so consistently recorded elsewhere. Indeed, for those who made records of the property they owned, having a sense of physical space was extremely important,



Photo 14.1. Arnarklettur ('Eagle's rock'), a natural boundary marker between the farm Hreðavatn in the commune of Norðurárdalur and the farm Laxfoss in the commune of Stafholtstungur, in Borgarfjörður, West Iceland. The stone is a part of a lava field that forms the natural boundary between the communes and properties. Photo: Andrew Reynolds.

even if in practice it was not particularly well informed.<sup>2</sup> Markers of community space, however, except through the use of the markers of constituent property units (or in the very specialized case of those of a religious community's 'protected space'<sup>3</sup>), are much less obvious and do not emerge strongly from these studies.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See above, pp.279–81.

<sup>3</sup> See W. Davies, "Protected Space" in Britain and Ireland in the Middle Ages', in *Scotland in Dark Age Britain*, ed. B. E. Crawford (St Andrews, 1996), pp.1–19 (pp.4–7).

<sup>4</sup> Bassett does however argue that fixed visible boundaries identified the territory of each community; above, p.116.

There are few clear parallels to the distinctive land-use at the margins of Breton *plebes* and *communes*.<sup>5</sup>

Very few communities in the early Middle Ages had anything like the legal definition of communities of the Roman Empire, as Adela Cepas so clearly demonstrates. Indeed, few early medieval communities beyond the lay or ecclesiastical household leave any evidence that their members had any sense of group participation or that the group performed this or that function for its members; in this the ninth-century Breton village communities discussed in the Introduction seem to be unusual, although we know of comparable communities from the Middle Rhineland.<sup>6</sup> The very fact that the strong and formal identities of the Roman period disintegrated is itself significant.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, Chris Wickham has recently drawn attention to the difference between eastern and western rural communities in this respect in the fifth to eighth centuries: while the villages of Anatolia and Egypt have left plentiful evidence of their vitality as functioning communities, with collective action and village officials, many of the settlements of western Europe leave a weak sense of community and a stronger sense of patronage networks at that time.<sup>8</sup> Of course, some texts suggest that individuals could feel a sense of belonging to groups beyond the household — to ‘peoples’ like Visigoths or Franks or to smaller population groups like the English Hwicce or Irish Osraige — but whether or not that sense was shared by all members of the group is highly debatable, despite one suggestion that all the Franks got together in the eighth century;<sup>9</sup> it is an open question whether such groups had any practical social functions or any part in the regulation of social life. As for any shared sense of belonging: it has recently been convincingly demonstrated that it is

<sup>5</sup> See above, pp.6–9.

<sup>6</sup> See M. Innes, *State and Society in the Early Middle Ages: The Middle Rhine Valley, 400–1000* (Cambridge, 2000), especially pp.94–140.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. W. Pohl, ‘The Construction of Communities and the Persistence of Paradox: An Introduction’, in *The Construction of Communities in the Early Middle Ages: Texts, Resources and Artefacts*, ed. R. Corradini, M. Diesenberger and H. Reimitz (Leiden, 2003), pp.1–15 (p.12), on the decline of civic identity in the post-Roman period in Europe. See also above, pp.41–42, 205–07, 214.

<sup>8</sup> C. J. Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2005), ch. 7, especially pp.390–93, 397–98, 438–40, also ch. 8, pp.514, 516–18. Iñaki Martín Viso points out to me that the more active presence of the state in the East required local communities to enter into dialogue and thereby the vitality of their functions is more easily demonstrable.

<sup>9</sup> Pohl, ‘Construction of Communities’, p.10.

difficult to attach any sense of belonging to anyone other than a person of high status as also that the meaning of names like 'Frank' changed over time; 'identities had to be flexible and largely virtual'; ethnicities might be created, dismantled and recreated.<sup>10</sup> Functioning communities beyond the residential household did begin to become clear in the West as they established distinctive identities in the central Middle Ages, like the self-conscious identities of urban and craft associations. Grenville Astill shows how late it was before urban identities formed in southern England, although tithing groups should at least in theory have been clear from the tenth century and guilds are certainly well evidenced then — he cites the long distances that guild members might travel for guild purposes, up to 25 km and exceptionally 80 km.<sup>11</sup> We can therefore identify a series of important, related problems: should we consider the possibility that, until the formation of distinctive new communities like tithings or guilds, there were no communities beyond the household or family? Were the Rhineland communities and the Breton *plebes*, in essence village communities, truly unusual? Or should we suppose that rural society changed in the West in the central Middle Ages and that the Rhenish and Breton societies are precocious symptoms of a wider change, symptoms that happen to have been well recorded?<sup>12</sup> Alternatively, should we suppose that local communities existed but are concealed in the record — communities of economic cooperation, communities of quasi-legal competence, communities of believers, and so on, at the same time overlaid by the networks of chosen associations (of clientship, of tenancy, of exchange, of guild)? In practice most contributors to this book adopt the latter assumption. The problem then becomes one of reconstruction: how can we spot the communities that must have been there? What criteria should we use? How can we avoid circularity?

<sup>10</sup> R. Wenskus, *Stammesbildung und Verfassung: Das Werden der frühmittelalterlichen Gentes* (Cologne, 1961) for the classic statement; W. Pohl, 'Telling the Difference: Signs of Ethnic Identity', and I. Wood, 'Conclusion: Strategies of Distinction', both in *Strategies of Distinction: The Construction of Ethnic Communities, 300–800*, ed. W. Pohl and H. Reimitz (Leiden, 1998), pp.17–69 and 297–303 (pp.21–22, 299, 63), for recent work. Cf. P. J. Geary, *The Myth of Nations: the Medieval Origins of Europe* (Princeton, 2002), for the 'myth' of ethnogenesis, especially pp.157–74.

<sup>11</sup> See above, p.252.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Wickham, *Framing*, who argues forcefully that the weak communities in the pre-ninth-century West developed much stronger collective identities and capacity for action in subsequent centuries; cf. Fouracre, above pp.272–73. Halsall would see a contrary development, that of fragmentation of earlier rural communities; above, pp.224–26.

Orri Vésteinsson is the most explicit about his approach to reconstruction, although not alone in his attitudes; he uses place-names, parishes and **tithe areas**\*, property units, assessments of natural resources, locations of churches and **chapels**\*, and awareness of proximity and distance, warning us to be wary of the settlement hierarchies of prehistoric archaeology and of mechanistic models. Those who work on England and Spain use comparable criteria, adding the location of cemeteries and meeting places, and numbers of churches. Guy Halsall is as systematic, but much more selective, arguing for the critical importance of the single diagnostic criterion of burial rite in the region of Metz — or rather for furnished burial — as the most important manifestation of community there in the early Merovingian period, an assessment of the importance of burial rite that is shared by other contributors. However, as time passed from sixth to seventh and eighth centuries, he argues, societies fragmented and new powerful families emerged. By contrast with these reconstructions, the explicitly evidenced community of the monastic household or *familia*\* is elaborated, in different ways, by Antonio Sennis and Paul Fouracre. These were clearly a different kind of community from that of the village but they equally clearly rapidly developed a capacity for corporate action. Sennis reminds us that joining a monastery often meant changing community, in most cases a self-conscious decision to move from one kind of group to another, accepting a new head and new principles of association.<sup>13</sup> Fouracre points out that, as in the case of Marmoutier in central France, the monastic *familia* could be extremely large and stretch very widely — indeed, up to 150 km. This was a very self-conscious association: people joined it willingly and knowingly, even if it might seem to have a detrimental effect upon their status.

One important lesson from all this is that the reconstructions are credible; they make sense, and in making sense they tend to support the argument that there must have been communities of association that are not directly evidenced (an isolated farmstead simply could not survive in a country like Iceland unless it was part of a functioning association<sup>14</sup>); however, it does not say much about the strength of community identity nor the chronology of community development. Another lesson is that the association of the *familia* or household could be much more extensive than we might initially think; it could be a network rather than a residential group, a network that overlapped and crosscut other communities.

<sup>13</sup> See above, p.278.

<sup>14</sup> See above, p.89.



Extent, scale and distance are considered at some length here, touching on the issues of territoriality that feature so strongly in earlier studies.<sup>15</sup> Communities could stretch over a wide territory — we have just noticed a very wide monastic *familia*. One kind of community could overlap another; and smaller communities could be nested within larger units. It is rarely appropriate to think in terms of a patchwork of totally discrete units. The concept of the **supralocality\***, articulated by Julio Escalona in the context of Castile, is picked up and applied by several, in different ways. The main argument here is that large units (50–70 km<sup>2</sup>, with some much larger variations), usually comprising several communities, are detectable in the landscapes of England and Spain, of the seventh and eighth centuries in the former region and of the tenth century (but already ancient) in the latter. Bassett, Escalona and Martín Viso all discuss this in detail, but although the single concept is applicable the contexts are different. Bassett's supralocality is the large parish of the early English **minster\***, subsequently to split into the parishes we know today. Escalona's is the administrative unit used by counts for governmental purposes. Martín Viso's is related to the latter but has an earlier dimension: he writes about supralocal systems which were the spatial framework for (often reoccupied) **hilltop sites\***; he goes on to detail the transformation of such supralocalities in the tenth century when they started to be used by the counts, although they were already an arena in which local power was expressed. How far were these large units of England and Spain truly comparable? Do our very similar methods of detection impose a spurious similarity? They look similar in that, as far as we can see, they primarily had an organizational, political function, be it ecclesiastical or secular, and they seem to have been imposed from outside (although Steven Bassett would argue that the area which a minster served as its parish originated in a territory, formed by the local farming population in the late fifth and sixth centuries, which directly related to the natural landscape and its agricultural and other economic potential; and Julio Escalona argues for 'pre-existing building blocks' incorporated in different ways into new administrative systems).<sup>16</sup> The concept of the supralocality is clearly useful, and it is also transportable. The important historical questions are to do with the extent to which it is anything other than an administrative device. Did it in itself constitute community of any sort, or was it simply a useful grouping of communities, or was it a framework within which different communities subsequently developed?

<sup>15</sup> See above, pp.2–5.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Wickham, *Framing*, pp.400–04 pointing to the *unusual* 'building block' character of some estates in western Neustria.

Icelandic patterns initially look somewhat different, although the geographical extent of regular personal contacts may be surprising in what is often a physically harsh landscape. We should remember, however, the relative ease of travel over frozen landscapes.<sup>17</sup> Each basic community, whose members were frequently separated by at least 1 km between farmsteads, and sometimes up to 4 km, might cover 10–20 km<sup>2</sup>, a kind of territoriality that is difficult to match elsewhere, even though in scale it begins to be comparable to the supralocality. Chris Callow shows the circumstances in which people normally met and shows how people might travel longer distances from valley to valley in the course of normal social relationships — normal relationships, as in other parts of Europe, often being revealed more through disputes than day-to-day functions.<sup>18</sup> He also shows how widely the alliance networks of richer farmers, *þingmenn* allied to their *goðar*, stretched: none of them lived in the same valley as his chieftain; networks might characteristically cover 50 or 60 km and in some cases of dispute protagonists might seek support from hundreds of kilometres away, in a wider ‘political’ community. The Marmoutier monastic network discussed by Paul Fouracre is comparable, not least in distance spanned, although it was obviously different in function. The distance between rural manors and towns makes a related point; although this is in essence a point about economic relationships rather than community membership, it reminds us of further networks, and overlapping networks; at least some of the members of those rural manors would have shared interests with some townspeople.<sup>19</sup> Lordly networks of patronage and clientship, also a notable feature in Castile, provide further examples. What is interesting here is the sense of membership, and of the benefits brought by membership, of networks that clearly overlapped other kinds of community: people did not have to choose one or the other; they could belong to both, or several. What is also interesting in the Marmoutier case is that here serfs explicitly formed a community, albeit a very special kind of community, unlike the excluded serfs of ninth-century Breton and tenth-century Castilian villages (in the latter the only full members of the community were heads of households, households which themselves often stretched beyond the nuclear family to include others such as more distant family members and serfs).<sup>20</sup> Networks were necessarily selective, strengthening the links

<sup>17</sup> See above, p.99.

<sup>18</sup> See above, pp.75–78. Cf. Pohl, ‘Construction of Communities’, p.6.

<sup>19</sup> See above, pp.251–52.

<sup>20</sup> As time passed and lordly domination increased, the distinction between free and serf tended to dissolve but an element of this distinction remained, as is revealed in disputes over

between special kinds of people, but they were nevertheless communities. Defining community in ways that included some people and excluded others appears to have been extremely common, even in smaller neighbourhoods; perhaps it was a norm. In Iceland the figure of the outsider was acutely drawn: the outsider had no rights to burial or community support, a distinction which very simply expresses the great importance of being an insider.

In the medieval regions which are the subject of this book, the simple discrete community seems to have been a rarity, just as the group that formed solely for purposes of survival was a rarity; overlapping communities, wherever one looks, were much more common, as the dominant city-based identities of Roman communities concealed a host of more local group identities and the Anglo-Saxon 'burghal' community was an administrative imposition across pre-existing communities.<sup>21</sup> Administrative communities might come and go, but they were not the whole story. That being the case, some interesting questions arise about the relationship between different kinds of community. For most people, was there a community beyond the residential household or farmstead that was in some sense the *core* community, with collective identity and a capacity for collective action, the primary unit of social organization, membership of which conferred social rights and gave access to mechanisms for redress of wrongs (like the village as it emerged in much of continental Europe, or the group of farmers in Iceland)? Were the networks of association subsidiary to such core groups? Which community empowered its members most? For the free individual, was it the core, face-to-face group, or was it the complex of overlapping communities that gave the greatest rights of participation? And how did the economic community relate to the others?

Many of the discussions of scale in this book invoke the notion of central place or central settlement.<sup>22</sup> The kinds of central place vary, from the local focal point

whether a lord's dependents should be admitted to full community rights; see Escalona above, p.158.

<sup>21</sup> See above, pp.200–07, 237–40, 254.

<sup>22</sup> Cf., in a different theoretical framework, the increase in central places in southern Scandinavia in the early Middle Ages: U. Näsman, 'The Justinianic Era of South Scandinavia: An Archaeological View', in *The Sixth Century: Production, Distribution and Demand*, ed. R. Hodges and W. Bowden (Leiden, 1998), pp.255–78 (pp.269–71), and U. Näsman, 'Exchange and Politics: The Eighth–Early Ninth Century in Denmark', in *The Long Eighth Century*, ed. I. L. Hansen and C. Wickham (Leiden, 2000), pp.35–68 (pp.65–68). For the classic theory, see W. Christaller, 'How I Discovered the Theory of Central Places: A Report About the Origin of

of the small-scale community (like a church) through the hilltop site associated with political control of the supralocality or the city at the centre of a *civitas*\* to the meeting place or burial place of scattered communities, but they have at least a notional, and often a physical, centrality in common. Firstly, as Sennis and Fouracre make clear, the monastery was in more senses than one a central place, be it central to a restricted locality or to a vast network: those who wrote about it thought of the monastery as central to the surrounding physical world and the centre of the spiritual community; it was also central in terms of authority — the point from which orders were given, and from which collectors and inspectors went out, a controlling point for its dependencies. Some churches were also central places, be they the English minster church, the Icelandic chief farm church or the Castilian village church, although not all churches were central places, witness the many churches of Icelandic, English and Spanish countrysides. The central churches were, again, places of control and collection, but they were also places that were increasingly visited by their associated communities of the parish or proto-parish — the control place in effect became a meeting place. In England royal collection centres feature strongly too, perhaps reflecting the dominant role of kings in the English historiography; and in all parts there is the lord's house or the castle or the evolving *villa*\*-centre as control and/or collection point. In Spain the centres of the supralocal units of *alfoces*\*, and the hilltop sites, are notable central places, and Escalona would see his larger 'central settlements' as small capitals, seats of power, dominating the surrounding hinterland; such central places may often have been points of political control but they could perform different functions, some imposed from outside, some reflecting an internal need.<sup>23</sup> In Iceland, and perhaps in England, there were meeting places that were also a kind of central place, not a place imposed from outside but the natural places for people who needed to come together to do so; despite the often over-stated ideology of *þing*\* or folkmoot in the modern historiography, where they existed (and some clearly did) they must have been the focal points of wider, political and/or economic communities.<sup>24</sup>

There are clearly different kinds of central place here, from the straightforward point of domination to the place to which people voluntarily travelled. It is

Central Places', in *Man, Space, and Environment: Concepts in Contemporary Human Geography*, ed. P. W. English and R. C. Mayfield (London, 1972), pp.601–10; P. Haggett, A. D. Cliff and A. Frey, *Locational Models* (London, 1977), pp.143–45, 240–41.

<sup>23</sup> See above, pp.159, 179–85.

<sup>24</sup> See above, pp.79–80.

therefore irrelevant to ask if the central place was an expression of community or a point of external domination — it was both and there is no necessary tension between the two. In the literature there is a strand that argues that pre-existing central places must have served a community function, rather like the model of the Iron Age hill fort as refuge,<sup>25</sup> but this is difficult to investigate. More fruitful, and the larger question, is to think about churches. Where churches are focal, as they certainly became as parishes developed, which came first, church or community? Did the positioning of a church, and the need for people to attend, in effect create community, as some contributors to this book imply, or were churches placed where communities already existed, as others maintain? In some parts of Europe churches can hardly have been placed where there were existing communities, for the huge parishes of Cumbria and Scandinavia, and the small parishes of towns, relate more to the crude numbers of people to be served than to whether or not there was a local community. Birna Lárusdóttir notes how far the inhabitants of Reykjavíki had to travel to go to church.<sup>26</sup>

The issue of whether the placing of a church was a stimulus or a reaction takes us to the determinants of community identity. For some contributors the parish is community, even if only one of several communities, and the imperative of pastoral care, and its territorial designation, was clearly sometimes a major determinant (although Paul Fouracre warns us against the ‘imagined community’ of the parish). There were other communities, created by other kinds of stimulus, like the *breppur*\* in Iceland, the community of twenty or more farming households that provided for poor relief;<sup>27</sup> or the community of tax-paying tenants in Frankish Gaul.<sup>28</sup> Here there were external demands for provision of pastoral care, or poor relief or tax. Others may have been more organic, conditioned by the economic imperative to sustain life, by the relationships of production, or by proximity, like the hypothetical ‘genuine’ community of Tönnies.<sup>29</sup> Purely geographical determinants are less discussed in this book, although most contributors think them a fundamental, if not a solely determining, element — physical

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Glan Jones’s refuge points in his multiple estate model, e.g. his ‘The Multiple Estate as a Model Framework for Tracing Early Stages in the Evolution of Rural Settlement’, in *L’Habitat et les paysages ruraux d’Europe*, ed. F. Dussart (Liège, 1971), pp.251–67.

<sup>26</sup> See above, p.50.

<sup>27</sup> See Vésteinsson and Callow above, pp.102, 79–82.

<sup>28</sup> See Halsall above, pp.227–29.

<sup>29</sup> See above, p.5.

features, resources, agricultural potential, communications.<sup>30</sup> Orri Vésteinsson argues strongly against settlement form itself as a determinant: conglomerations did not have to coincide with fiscal or property units, and often did not do so; community identity could and did develop without nucleation of settlement. Landlordship too might shape communities, as Frankish material in particular seems to suggest, communities of tenants constituting the most visible of groupings in the seventh and eighth centuries, although there are issues here about the extension of lordly domination over once-free proprietors.<sup>31</sup> Although it is implicit in some of the English material, change and development is not much discussed outside these Frankish contexts; Fouracre, however, presents a clear progression from the community of tenants of a lordly estate to an emergent village, as the power of the dominant monastic lord declined in a world of competing lordships, more cash and greater mobility. But the emerging lordships of tenth-century Castile impacted upon *existing* rural communities in northern Spain, although in parts of León and Castile these developing lordships can be shown to have added impetus to the expression of community identity.<sup>32</sup> While it is entirely reasonable to postulate development from tenant community to one or more villages in some parts, this model will not work for all parts. Lordship impacted upon rural groups in different ways.

So what about the contrasts and the comparabilities? Despite some differences in the chronology of development, and despite the stark differences in physical environment, there are perhaps more similarities between Iceland, southern England, northern Francia and northern Spain than might have been imagined. There are clearly differences, and especially differences in settlement form, but we have argued that these did not determine the fact or nature of community. There is in fact a sense in which the harsher the environment, the greater the distance the core community tended to cover and the farther selective networks extended — ‘the ties that bound people together [. . .] outweighed the physical distances that separated their settlements’.<sup>33</sup> Environmental factors are invariably important but are rarely the only significant determinants, and these societies were much

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Lárusdóttir above, pp.48–49.

<sup>31</sup> See Halsall and Fouracre above, pp.230, 262–64. Cf. Wickham, *Framing*, pp.398–406, on the Paris basin.

<sup>32</sup> See W. Davies, ‘The Early Middle Ages and Spanish Identity’, in *Power and Identity: Essays Presented to Rees Davies*, ed. H. Pryce and J. Watts (Oxford, forthcoming).

<sup>33</sup> Above, p.112.

too complex to associate purely in order to survive. As for the government/locality relationship, at present the evidence that governments, lords and churches had a hand in creating communities looks as strong as that which suggests that they brought out of obscurity existing local groupings, not least because groups frequently changed, forming, combining, splitting and re-forming.

We did not find much evidence of physical markers left by local communities, although they were widely used to mark properties. We found communities and associations of many kinds, from the hamlet to the far-flung network, overlapping and nested; rarely did we find the discrete community. We hope we have provided plenty of methodological guidance — particularly on how to spot the community that does not leave much of a mark in surviving contemporary sources. We answered some questions but posed more. The important questions that remain are to do with the formation of ‘core’ communities beyond the residential household, their capacity for collective action and their relationship with the several networks of association to which some (or all) of their members also belonged.



Photo 14.2. The group at the hillfort of La Cerca, Quintanar de la Sierra.





## GLOSSARY

compiled by Guy Halsall

*NOTE* An asterisk following a word indicates that the word is a main entry elsewhere in the Glossary.

*Alfoz* (pl. *alfoces*). Castilian. The standard term — but not the only one — for a medieval Castilian administrative district. For the Castilian counts (up to 1037) and kings (thereafter), the *alfoces* were the territorial framework for both governance and patrimony management. The free population in each of those units were subject to jurisdiction, probably work renders, and to military obligations which were later converted into taxes. The original network of Castilian *alfoces* seems to have been created in the late ninth to early tenth centuries on the basis of existing territorial units of supralocal\* kind.

*Alþing*. Icelandic. Iceland's central or 'national' assembly, held annually in the summer at Þingvellir in south-west Iceland. Presided over by a Lawspeaker, the *alþing* was the venue for the Law court and two tiers of judicial courts. *Goðorðsmenn*\* held the votes in the Law Court and had the right to appoint judges to the judicial courts but not sit on the panels themselves.

*Ancilla* (pl. *ancillae*). Latin. A female serf. The term has connotations of domestic service, but usually appears to denote female servitude in general.

*Ango* (pl. *angones*). Latin? A heavy iron javelin with a barbed head, like a harpoon, found in lavishly furnished sixth-century male burials in the Frankish territories and elsewhere, and described in use by Procopius.

*Bænhús* (pl. *bænhús*). Icelandic. Literally ‘prayer-house’. Chapel\*. The lowest ranking type of church, serviced by a priest from a nearby parish\* church (*sóknarkirkja*\*) twelve times a year or less. As a rule *bænhús* had cemeteries associated with them.

*Bær* (pl. *bæir*). Icelandic. Farmstead, general term referring to the site of a farm. See also *lögþýli*\* and *hundrað*\*.

Banal lord. A lord who exercised a range of judicial, fiscal and military rights, many of which had originally been derived from royal or public authority. Characteristic of Frankish areas in the central Middle Ages.

*Burh*. Old English. A fort. Specifically the term is used to describe the royal fortresses constructed — or placed into an administrative system — in England during the reign of Alfred the Great and his successors.

*Bygð* (pl. *byggðir*). Faroese. Literally, ‘settlement’. Hamlet or village. A geographically discrete settlement including one or more *fyrndarbýlingur*\*.

*Byggð* (pl. *byggðir*). Icelandic. Literally, ‘settlement’. Neighbourhood. Less specific and generally more extensive than *hverfi*\*, *þorp*\* or Faroese *byggð*\*.

Cartulary. A book into which charters and documents from an archive were copied. Theoretically lacking legal probatory status, cartularies were normally intended for easy archival reference and consultation. Following the loss or destruction of original charters, cartularies are often our only source for early medieval charter texts.

*Castellum* (pl. *castella*). Latin. Originally a small fort and, in the later Roman period, a fortified settlement of lower status than *civitates*\* or *municipia*\*. By the tenth century, a fortification that might also be a residence, or part of a settlement, unlike the ‘tower’ which seems to have been purely a garrisoned defensive structure.

Chapel. A church which lacked independent parish\* status. See also *bænhús*\*, parochial chapel\*.

Chapelry. The defined area served by a parochial chapel\*.

*Civitas* (pl. *civitates*). Latin. During the Roman Empire, an administrative unit, in Britain and Gaul often preserving the territory of a pre-Roman tribal unit, though in Spain with a more complex relationship to pre-Roman units, and usually based around a city, for which the same term — *civitas* — is used. The *civitas* was the building block of many western imperial provinces and, following the conversion of Constantine, often became a Christian diocese. In early medieval sources the term preserves its meaning as an area around a major administrative centre but by the eleventh century it is often used to mean ‘town’.

*Cognatio* (pl. *cognationes*). Latin. In Roman inscriptions, this term is used to mean relationship by birth. Kin groupings in the Celtiberic language are normally expressed by an adjective in the genitive plural deriving from a personal name.

*Colibertus* (pl. *coliberti*). Latin. A type of serf. How *coliberti* differed from *servi*\* is not made clear in documents from north-west France in the eleventh century.

*Conventus iuridicus*. Latin. In the Roman period, a large jurisdictional district whose population depended on a capital for the administration of justice. The *conventus* seems to have gone out of use during the third century AD.

Curacy. The office of a priest, often very poorly paid, who assisted a rector or vicar, that is, of an assistant priest (as opposed to a parish\* priest).

*Curia*. Latin. In the Roman period, the assembly of the (urban) local Senate.

Demesne land. The parts of an estate or (in England) manor, which its lord kept in his own hands for direct management in contrast to those parts leased out to tenants.

*Denarius* (pl. *denarii*). Latin. Originally an early Roman coin, by the later part of the European early Middle Ages, it was a silver coin: the ‘penny’. Conventionally there were twelve *denarii* to the *solidus*\*.

Emir. From the Arabic *’amir*. In the Iberian regions under Muslim rule, the title of the highest ruler from the conquest to 929 AD, when Abd al-Rahman III took the title of Caliph.

*Familia*. Latin. Household; group of dependants of a lord or of a church or of a monastery. Often associated with an ensemble of serfs on an estate, in the case of a monastery the group could include the monks as well as better-off clients, tributaries and serfs, for all were pledged to serve forever.

*Feorm*. Old English. The tribute paid to an Anglo-Saxon king, normally in the form of a wide range of foodstuffs, and normally in an amount determined by the number of hides\* at which a payee's land was assessed.

*Fines*. Latin. Literally 'limits'. In early medieval Frankish charters, the term used for a small geographical territory. Sometimes *fines* are associated with particular settlements, but often it seems that settlement within them was dispersed. *Fines* often have place-names ending with *-acum* or *-ensis*, both implying a region. The Germanic equivalent of this term is *marca*\*.

Formula. Latin. A standard phrase in a document, or a model document.

*Francisca* (pl. *fransciscae*). Latin? A throwing axe commonly found in late fifth- and sixth-century cemeteries in Frankish territories and described in use by Sidonius Apollinaris and Agathias. The *francisca* might have been developed in the very late Roman army, rather than, as usually assumed (but without evidence) being a Frankish import. Isidore of Seville believed that the Franks took their name from the *francisca*.

*Fyrndarbýlingur* (pl. *fyrndarbýlingar*). Faroese. Literally, 'ancient-farm'. Assessed farm, one or more of which made up a *bygð*\*. *Fyrndarbýlingar* could be subdivided into numerous households.

Glebe land. Land with which a late medieval English church was endowed, and from which its priest derived most of his subsistence.

*Goðorðsmaðr* (pl. *goðorðsmenn*). Icelandic. The owner of a *goðorð*, a seat in the Law court (the legislature) of the *alþing*\*, the national assembly. Normally associated with temporal power, but although as a group *goðorðsmenn* represented the topmost tier of *höfðingjar*\* in Iceland, as individuals they could be powerless placeholders.

**Hide.** A unit of assessment of liability to pay the public burdens which were imposed on most land in Anglo-Saxon England.

**Hilltop sites.** The late antique and early medieval periods saw a flourishing of (normally fortified) hilltop settlements, sometimes reoccupying deserted Late Iron Age hill forts. Hilltop sites varied much in size and functions. Many were created by local communities (often in relation to a residential area nearby), but some were set up by central authorities to serve as central places for territorial control.

**Hoba** (pl. *hobae*). In early medieval Frankish charters, the latinized version of the Germanic word for *mansus*\*. In the charter evidence there seems to be no technical difference between the two terms.

**Höfðingi** (pl. *höfðingjar*). Icelandic. Chieftain. General term for a significant or de facto leader, but who might not be a *goðorðsmaðr*\*.

**Hospitium.** Latin. In the Roman period, a formal guest-friendship and patronage relationship linking individuals and/or communities; both parties established privileged links between them by granting each other especial rights and duties.

**Hreppur** (pl. *breppar*). Icelandic. Commune or district. An association of twenty or more *lögþýli*\* forming a geographically continuous area, collectively responsible for poor-relief and insurance in case of fire. Could also coordinate pest control and communal grazing of livestock. As a rule *breppar* were larger units than *sóknir*\*.

**Hundrað** (pl. *hundruð*). Icelandic. Literally, 'one hundred'. Unit of valuation of landed property, traditionally regarded as equivalent to 120 ells of homespun cloth or one cow or six ewes with lambs. *Lögþýli*\* were assessed in *hundruð*. An average Icelandic *lögþýli* was valued at 20–24 *hundruð* while a 60-*hundruð* *lögþýli* would be considered a *stórþýli* — a major farm or estate.

**Hundred.** An English administrative land unit, focussed on a court to which individual constituent manors sent representatives; it was a formal subdivision of a shire\* (known as a wapentake in much of northern and eastern England).

*Hverfi* (pl. *hverfi*). Icelandic. Neighbourhood. A cluster of *bæir*\* or the *bæir* of a geographically discrete area. See also *byggð*\* and *þorp*\*.

*Infanzón* (pl. *infanzones*). Castilian. In eleventh-century Castile, the lesser rank of nobility. Though etymologically referring to nobility by birth, it was seen fit to translate the Latin *milites*\*. *Infanzones* are often recorded as forming the lesser ranks in aristocratic clientage networks, but also acting collectively as a body of local notables in defence of the rights of local/supralocal\* communities.

King's *tūn*. Old English. An Anglo-Saxon royal estate and its chief buildings, the latter being the regular collecting-point for the *feorm*\* of the inhabitants of the surrounding district. (It is usually referred to as *cyninges tūn* in Old English sources and as *villa*\* *regalis* in Latin ones.)

*Lögbýli* (pl. *lögbýli*). Icelandic. Literally, 'legal-farm'. Assessed farm, a taxable and tradable unit of land with at least one farming household. Communal obligations were levied on the *lögbýli* and not on its subdivisions. See also *bær*\*.

*Mansus* (pl. *mansi*). Latin. Farm. *Mansi* were the constituent units of Merovingian *villae*\*. Sometimes the word refers to dependent tenancies within a landholding, but it can also refer to an apparently extensive estate with dependencies and appurtenances, and be described in exactly analogous terms to unitary *villa*-estates\*.

*Marca*. Old High German. In early medieval Frankish charters, the Germanic equivalent of *fines*\*. There seems to have been no technical difference between the two terms.

*Merindades menores*. Castilian. Administrative districts, each under the rule of one *merino* (royal officer), which were developed between the late twelfth and early thirteenth century. The newly created network superseded the *alfóz*\* system. The *merindades menores* were substantial territories, each comprising several of the old *alfóces*. In the thirteenth century, there was yet a higher level, the *Merindad Mayor de Castilla*, roughly coterminous with the county of Old Castile.

*Milites*. In classical Latin, the term means simply 'soldiers', but by the eleventh century it had come to denote mounted soldiers, and as the latter rose in social status, it became a general term for the lesser 'nobility'.

Minster. A complex ecclesiastical settlement headed by an abess, abbot, or man in priest's orders; which contains nuns, monks, priests or laity in a variety of possible combinations, and is united to a greater or lesser extent by their liturgy and devotions; which may perform or supervise pastoral care to the laity, perhaps receiving dues and exerting parochial authority; and which may sometimes act as a bishop's seat, while not depending for its existence or importance on that function [with grateful thanks to John Blair for this definition].

Mother-church. In England, a church with pastoral responsibility for an area much larger than a standard late medieval/modern parish\*, and with supervisory powers over other, lesser public churches (i.e. chapels\*) in that area.

Mozarabic. From the Arabic *musta'rib*, denoting 'arabized'. Used by a prominent historiographical tradition to designate the Christian population living under Muslim rule in Iberia, and also a brand of pre-Romanesque style art and architecture (also manuscript illumination) mixing a strong Visigothic background together with Arabic aesthetic and cultural influence.

*Municipium* (pl. *municipia*). Latin. In the Roman period, a town with a formal right to self-governance, whose free inhabitants were in possession of the status of Roman citizenship.

*Oppidum* (pl. *oppida*). Latin. Although it occurs in texts from the Roman period, in the Duero basin (and elsewhere) this term is usually employed by modern historians to designate the largest late pre-Roman Iron Age (often referred to as Celtiberic) settlements. These were substantial sites, often provided with walls or ramparts and some form of urbanism, as opposed to the more elementary hill forts. Some *oppida* became Roman towns and eventually achieved a municipal status as *municipia*\*.

Parish. The geographical area inhabited by the people who received pastoral care from a church with designated responsibility for providing care — either directly or through the intermediacy of another lesser church (alias a chapel\*), which was ecclesiastically subject to the responsible church. See also *sókn*\*, tithe area\*.

Parochial chapel. A public church which, although lacking independent parish\* status, assisted an English mother-church\* in the delivery of pastoral care to a substantial part of the latter's parish.

*Patronus*. Latin. In the Roman period, a prominent individual acting as a *protector* (defender) of the interests of individuals, whole cities or even entire provinces. See further *tabula patronatus*\*.

*Placitum* (pl. *placita*). A formal court hearing, or the document recording such a hearing, or a legal case that might be protracted, that is, involving several hearings of various kinds. In eleventh-century documents from north-west France the term most often refers to a formal court hearing.

Polyptychs. Literally meaning ‘many-leaved’ documents, these were extensive surveys of church estates, produced in the ninth and tenth centuries, originally at the bidding of the Carolingian rulers of the Franks.

*Praeceptum* (pl. *praecepta*). A royal charter which, at least in theory, royal authority made binding.

*Realengo*. Castilian. In medieval Castile, the king’s specific lordship, one of four main seignorial forms which were recognized in the central medieval period, together with *abadengo* (ecclesiastical lordship), *solariego* (secular aristocratic lordship) and *behetría* (a complex, archaic hybrid of royal and aristocratic lordship). It notionally derived from royal control of (especially military) obligations owed by supralocal units\* directly subjected to the king with exclusion of other lordly interests.

Ringwork. In England, a private fortification, usually approximately circular, consisting of a bank and ditch and often with a strongly defended entrance.

*Sceatta*. From the Old English word *sceatt* (‘wealth’), in some Old English sources it is also used for a coin, 1/240 to 1/250 of a pound and thus roughly equivalent to Frankish *denarii*\*. Modern numismatists, historians and archaeologists have applied the word to specific series of middle Saxon silver coins introduced from the seventh century.

*Servus* (pl. *servi*). Latin. In classical Latin, a slave, but the meaning of the term evolves with the institution of servitude. By the eleventh century the *servus* had become a serf, that is, a peasant dependent on a lord, with restrictions on marriage and inheritance, the condition being hereditary. In West Frankish sources *servi* acknowledged their unfree status by placing four pennies on their heads.



*Shieling* (*sel* in Icelandic). A temporary dwelling place in the outfield where milk cows and ewes were grazed and milked during the summer. Sometimes shielings became permanent farms.

*Shire*. Originally meaning a 'share' of land, the shire system formed the basis of provincial organization in the Late Anglo-Saxon period in England. These large territories were divided into hundreds\*.

*Sókn* (pl. *sóknir*). Icelandic. Literally, 'attendance'. Originally the area for which services were provided by a particular church, it was later a territorially defined parish\* as conveyed by the word *þing*\*.

*Sóknarkirkja* (pl. *sóknarkirkjur*). Icelandic. Literally, 'attended church'. Parish\* church. A church with a resident priest who might also service *útkirkjur* which had their own tithe areas\*.

*Solidus* (pl. *solidi*). Latin. Originally, from the fourth century, a gold coin weighing 1/72 of a pound. In medieval western Europe, after the end of gold coinage, it came to refer to weights of metals rather than to coins themselves. It was usually reckoned that one *solidus* was worth twelve silver *denarii*\*.

*Suburbium*. A word of Roman origin used, in tenth- and eleventh-century Castile, to designate a central settlement's hinterland, normally coincident with an administrative district, as an alternative to the more usual *alfoz*\*. It was used, without distinction, for proto-urban and clearly non-urban hierarchical settlements.

*Supralocal unit*. In the early medieval Castilian landscape there are found territorial blocks which included several settlements (of village and hamlet size), with both individual and common use of landed resources (especially valleys) within the block; they were often in the order of 50–100 km<sup>2</sup>, but could be as large as 250 km<sup>2</sup>. In origin they relate to the exploitation of the land, and to the organization of space, by local communities; some have central places, such as hilltop sites\*. Some of them were used by Castilian rulers in the tenth century and later in order to build a structure through which to exercise political control, especially through the network of *alfoces*\*.

*Tabula patronatus*. Latin. In the Roman period, a legal document (often inscribed on a metal tablet) by which a *patronus*\* granted his protection to an individual, group or community.

Tephra. Volcanic ash. Layers of volcanic ash attributed to known eruptions are an important dating tool in Icelandic archaeology. The Veidivötn tephra of  $871 \pm 2$  ('Landnám tephra') and the Hekla tephra of 1104 are important chronozones for the colonization period in Iceland.

*Tessera* (pl. *tesserae*). Latin. In the Roman period, small and light metallic or wooden pieces intended to serve as proof of identity for either an individual (with the purpose of distribution of silver or wheat, access to the games, etc.) or the parties involved in a pact of hospitality. *Tesserae hospitalis* are pairs of bronze pieces (often cut in the shape of animals or objects) split in two symmetrical parts, each one inscribed on the smoother face with the text of a pact of hospitality. In Roman Spain, the text of these *tesserae* is written in both Celtiberic and Latin.

Tithe area. An area, within which all the *lögbylí*\* paid tithe to a particular church. In the Icelandic parish\* structure, *útkirkjur* ('out churches' dependent upon parish churches — *sóknarkirkjur*\*), but not *bænhús*\*, had their own tithe areas, so that a *þing*\* could be made up of many tithe areas, some consisting of only one *lögbylí*.

*Þing* (pl.). Icelandic. The area served by a priest. Could include a number of churches of different types (e.g. *bænhús*\*) although as a rule *þing* only included one church where the priest had his abode (*sóknarkirkja*\*). In the singular (also *þing*) this word means 'assembly'.

*Þorp* (pl. *þorp*). Icelandic. Neighbourhood or hamlet. Cluster of *bæir*\*, normally more clustered than either *hverfi*\* or *byggðir*\*.

*Vicus* (pl. *vici*). Latin. In the Roman period, a rural agglomeration of lower status than *municipia*\* or *civitates*\*. When fortified, in Gaul generally in the Late Roman period, these could be referred to as *castra* or *castella*\*. In tenth-century north-west France, the term is used to mean a rural settlement without a resident lord, possibly inhabited by peasants of both free and unfree status. The term occurs occasionally in early medieval Spanish texts, often designating the centres of *alfoces*\*.

*Villa*. Latin. This word changed its meaning during the early medieval period, in accordance with chronological and regional changes and variations in the rural settlement pattern. In the Roman period it meant the physical buildings at the centre of a *villa*-estate\*. In the immediately post-imperial west, it was generally used to mean a small territory, sometimes a single estate, but more often an area within which a number of people could hold lands. In tenth- and eleventh-century Castilian charters this is the word usually employed to designate a rural settlement of village rank and/or its territory. In eleventh-century West Frankish sources the term appears to denote a type of settlement associated with a lord, or lord's residence, although several lords might have a share in a single *villa*.

*Villa*-estate. In the Roman period, an estate worked by a dependent population, comprising land, a central building (the *villa*-building or *pars residentialis*), production and storage facilities, and other dependent dwellings.



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Plate 1. Hrísakot ruins in the foreground, marked by a double earthwork. Above middle is the modern farm of Skörð. The straight earthwork in the foreground marks the boundary between Laxamýri and Skörð. Photo: Árni Einarsson.

